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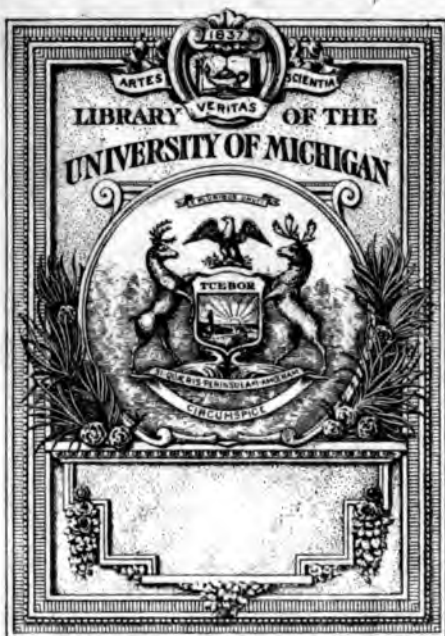
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THE GIFT OF
Prof. W. M. Dixon







Brave Belgians

From the French of
Baron C. ^{de} Buffin

By
Alys Hallard

Preface by
Baron de Broqueville
Belgian Minister of War

Awarded the Audifred Prize by the French Academy of
Moral and Political Science

G. P. Putnam's Sons
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1918



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Foreword

ST. PIERREBROUCK.

January 15, 1916.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

I am glad to hear that you have now completed the work you undertook of collecting, from our soldiers themselves, these accounts of the war. They will certainly help people to know, and to appreciate, what you so rightly call our heroic and valiant Belgium.

You could not have employed your talent and activity in a better way. As it is not yet possible to write the History of the tragic days we are living, it is highly necessary to collect the most striking episodes, and to prevent the loss of testimony to which posterity can appeal when it wishes to judge the men and things of our times. The accounts that you have collected so patiently help us to live over again the whole campaign, from the startling revelation which the glorious days of Liège were for many of us, down to the hard moments through which our army is passing in its victorious defence of the Yser.

"The determined resistance," our King called it in his memorable speech to Parliament. How we see this determined resistance in the magnificent enthusiasm of our soldiers, arresting, around the Liège forts, the first wave of invaders, without troubling about the human torrent rolling onwards towards them from the whole of Germany! How we see it,

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Prof. Marmale Duxon 2-12-1916
received 20-1-17 54

too, in the tragic episodes of the invasion, in the bold adventures of our volunteers, in those glorious deaths of which your book reminds us, deaths of which we cannot think without a pang at our hearts!

Your accounts prove to us how the unanimous will of the nation galvanised the army and how the example of our chiefs, from the King down to the merest sub-lieutenant, encouraged and brought about the most noble self-sacrifices. These accounts prove to us, thanks to many details of episodes lived through during these eighteen months of war, what a quantity of virtues our magnificent little army, brave and studious as it is, held in reserve for the hour of danger.

Well-known figures and deeply regretted friends are evoked in these pages by their sorrowful comrades. These rapid sketches, written in campaign diaries by those who shared the same dangers and sacrificed everything to the same cause, have a special value. The modesty of the man who tells the story is still another homage rendered to the whole Corps, and it is to the Army, to the traditional, disciplined, national force, that our admiration goes out, when we read of the fine deeds described in this book.

On reading it, the country will better understand the affection and respect it owes to the soldier from whom it may demand, some future day, all that those of our day have endured and given.

In your former book, you retraced for us the early life of Leopold I., our first king. When I congratulated you on your conscientious work, in depicting for us the early days of the man who has very justly been called Leopold the Wise, I little thought that you would soon be the chronicler of the army of his

Foreword

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grandson, acknowledged by the whole world, as the champion of loyalty and honour, the incarnation of an oppressed and valiant country.

How times have changed since then!

The horizon is brightening, though, and I hope that, in order to complete your work, you may be able to connect the past with the present and sketch for us the History of this gigantic struggle, in which the indomitable courage of the Belgians, led by Albert I., will have preserved, for our country, the Independence, and the Liberty that the political spirit of our fathers had won for it under the reign of Leopold.

Accept, my dear friend, my best wishes,

BROQUEVILLE.



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Brave Belgians



Brave Belgians

CHAPTER I

The Defence of Visé

FROM THE ACCOUNT GIVEN BY DEPUTY STAFF MAJOR COLLYNS
OF THE 12TH LINE REGIMENT¹

In order that the reader may have a connected idea with regard to the episodes related in the following chapters, the main lines of the preliminaries of the war must be remembered. On the 2nd of August, 1914, at 7 P. M., Germany presented an ultimatum to Belgium. The Belgian Government replied at 7 A. M. the following day that "it would resist, by all means within its power, any attempt to violate the rights of Belgium."

On the morning of the 4th of August, the German extreme right, composed of 12 Regiments of Cavalry and of Battalions of Chasseurs, brought in motor-cars, crossed the frontier and endeavoured to seize the Visé bridge. This attempt did not succeed. The enemy then extended its movement in a northerly direction, crossed the Meuse at the Lexhe ford and endeavoured to crush the resistance of the fortified place of Liège. On the 5th of August, troops of the 3rd, 4th, and 7th Corps made an assault on that part of the defence front comprised between the Meuse and the Vesdre. Before the Barchon, Evegnée, and Fléron Ports, the assailants were driven back with sanguinary losses.

¹ Now Lieutenant-Colonel, Commander of the 1st Line Regiment.

Brave Belgians

Between the Barchon Fort and the Meuse, the 7th Corps broke through the lines, but it was counter-attacked by the 11th Brigade with a bayonet charge, and thrown back in absolute disorder in the direction of the Dutch frontier.

Fresh assaults began in the night between the 5th and 6th of August. Fresh troops belonging to the 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th Corps took part, and the attack extended over the whole ground between the Liers Fort and the Meuse, above Liège, that is on a front of about 22 miles.

The Belgian troops had to face danger on every side at the same time and, after a most heroic defence, the 3rd Division fell back, exhausted. The Forts continued to resist and the last one fell on the 17th of August.

DURING the night of August 1-2, 1914, Lieutenant-General Leman, Military Governor of the fortified position of Liège, entrusted to me the defence of the Visé and Argenteau bridges. It was an important mission, as German forces were massed at the frontier and were preparing to violate our neutrality.

I hurried to the barracks, called up my Battalion¹ of about four hundred men, and started for Visé, where I arrived at seven in the morning. The whole day was taken up in organising the defence. A company was placed at each of the bridges of Visé and Argenteau, which are about two miles apart; a platoon of about thirty men were told off to guard the Lixhe ford, about six miles to the north; outposts were sent to the right bank of the river, with instructions to send out patrols and reconnaissances in the direction of the frontier. The rest of the Battalion remained in reserve at Haccourt. The soldiers were

¹ The Battalion, at that moment, consisted only of four contingents of militia, as the general mobilisation, decreed on July 31st, was not yet complete.

enthusiastic and had perfect confidence. Most of them looked upon the war as a kind of pleasure party, which would relieve the monotony of their barrack life, and their good humour increased, thanks to the cordial welcome they received from the population.

In the evening, Captain Chaudoir arrived with about sixty men. He was in command of the Mounted Chasseurs of the Liège Civic Guard. They were all brave fellows, courageous and ready for anything, but their equipment was very defective and they were even short of rifles. I accepted their services, nevertheless, and entrusted them with the surveillance of the valleys of the Meuse and the Geer.

The inhabitants of Visé also offered their help.

"I am a good shot," said a lawyer, "and I want to do my share. Put me in the firing line."

"No, I cannot have any civilians," I replied, categorically, and I sent them all away.

On the following day, August 3rd, M. Delattre arrived. He is an engineer, a specialist in explosives, and he had been sent by the Staff to attend to the obstruction of the right bank of the river and the destruction of the bridges. Groups of workmen, under his orders, felled trees with which to bar the roads, placed mines in the piles and, in short, put everything in readiness for the blowing up of the bridges, if necessary.

This fresh responsibility did not by any means lessen my anxiety. It was very difficult to realise what the situation really was. The most extraordinary rumours circulated and were believed, no matter how improbable they might seem. The Staff of the 3rd Army Division announced to me, by telephone, that German troops had crossed the Netherlands

and were advancing through Limbourg. Thanks to the telephonic communication I had established with the *gendarmerie* stations, and with Lieutenant de Menten, who was on the watch with a platoon of the 2nd Lancers, near the Dutch frontier, I obtained exact information with regard to the enemy's movements, and was able to let the Commander of the Division know that the rumours were inexact. They had been invented by Boche spies, and circulated by scaremongers. Towards evening, General Leman warned me that two divisions of the enemy's cavalry had invaded our territory. He ordered me to blow up the Visé and Argenteau bridges. I transmitted the order to Delattre and, whilst he was making his final arrangements, I withdrew my outposts from the right bank of the river and, for fear of accidents, proceeded to evacuate the houses in the vicinity. When everything was quite ready, Delattre came to me.

"You can make your mind easy," he said, "we have taken the precaution to put a double charge, so that whatever——"

The sound of an explosion interrupted his speech and we both hurried away full of confidence. Our disappointment can easily be imagined, for great blocks of macarite had not exploded. The Visé bridge was weakened, but it was still practicable for carriages. At Argenteau, I was told, the result was no better.

"Bad work!" declared a Sergeant, who appeared to be as mortified as I was. Several civilians were jeering. I pitched into them and that soothed my nerves.

We made use of the telephone at once and asked the

The Defence of Visé

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Staff at Liège to send us fresh explosives immediately. The delay seemed to us interminable and we wondered whether we should be surprised by the enemy.

The motor-cars arrived at last. We placed the powder, and by six o'clock all the necessary measures were taken. This time the explosion was formidable. Great blocks of stone, a cubic yard in diameter, were flung two hundred yards away. The middle of the bridge, about fifty yards in length, fell into the Meuse.

A most unfortunate accident now happened. The shock produced by the explosion destroyed the telegraphic and telephonic lines and interrupted all communications. I wondered what was to be done. Was my mission ended, as the bridges no longer existed? Ought I to return to our fortified position of Liège or stay and defend the passages of the river?

None of the couriers I sent to General Leman came back. I was therefore obliged to decide for myself. I was there and I determined to stay there. At day-break, on the 4th, I endeavoured to complete the defence by utilising the houses overlooking the bridges, as from them it would be possible to fight the enemy on the opposite bank of the river. My information service left much to be desired. From time to time, my soldiers crossed the river, in two little boats which we had discovered by chance, and went in search of news. It was in this way that I learnt the fact that an important corps of the enemy's cavalry was at Berneau and that it was followed, at a short distance by a strong force of infantry.

Suddenly, we heard a buzzing overhead and a *Taube* appeared in the sky. For a few minutes the sinister bird hovered over us, flinging down General von Emmich's proclamations. It then returned to

the enemy's lines, taking back very inexact information. In the first place, it could not see my troops hidden behind the houses, and it is very possible, thanks to its height, that it did not see that the bridge was destroyed, as the middle part was lying downwards in the Meuse.

Warned by the aeroplane I modified my arrangements and collected all my forces at Visé, with the exception of one Company which I had left at Argenteau. It was very fortunate that I acted in this way, as, at one o'clock, some Death's Head Hussars appeared in sight and, without any hesitation, made straight for the bridge. My soldiers watched them anxiously, their fingers on the triggers of their guns. "Wait," I said, "wait, let them come nearer." As soon as I saw them on the first part of the bridge, I yelled out "Fire!" "Piff! Paff! Piff! Paff!" . . . With the sudden crackling sound of the firing, the terrified horses reared, kicked, and struggled, and the horsemen rolled into the river; others, turning quickly around, rushed into the ranks that were following, collided with them and, in wild flight, escaped through the fields of clover and oats. All was helter-skelter! Just at this moment, heavy firing began from the houses on the right bank near the river. Unseen by us, some Germans had entered these buildings and were now protecting the retreat of their cavalry. From one bank to the other, the firing continued at intervals, but without much damage on either side. During a lull, I called out to my brave men: "Permission to grill one!" Ah, how joyfully they revelled in that cigarette! The baptism of fire had not produced the least emotion. They were all smiling and joking with each other, and as soon as the enemy

recommenced the firing, the combat continued as gaily as possible.

Sheltered by a wall, their jerseys unbuttoned, the men of my reserve contingent were fortifying themselves by devouring bread and butter. The idea suddenly occurred to me to try an experiment. "Well," I said, "are you not proud to take part in the firing? As you see, we have stopped the Boches. It is not finished, though, and just now I shall want three of you, three of the bravest, who fear nothing. Who volunteers?" Before I had finished speaking, every one of them shouted: "I do, Major."

The German artillery had now come into line. Two or three batteries on the slopes of Fouron, to the north-east of Visé, had opened fire. In spite of my men's courage, I felt it was necessary to stimulate them a little. They were only four hundred strong and, without artillery or machine-guns; they were fighting an enemy infinitely superior. I went to all the different shelters and affected the most hilarious gaiety.

"We are going to have fine fun," I said to them. "The Boches have never yet managed to fire straight with their cannons, and their projectiles will fall everywhere except in the houses we are occupying." This succeeded very well and the men greeted the German shrapnels, which were bursting at tremendous heights, with laughter. My joy was great, for if the artillery had fired straight into the houses, our position would have been impossible and we should have been obliged to retreat. Ah, if we had only had a few guns, how many of our adversaries we should have brought down!

During the combat, some of the horsemen of the

Civic Guard told me that a huge infantry column had crossed the Meuse, north of Visé and that a battery was already directing its firing on us. This news seemed all the more probable, as we heard a cannonading which appeared to be coming from a height on the left bank. Isolated as we were, and not having received any instructions, my situation was extremely disquieting. In order to protect my retreat, I gave orders to the 2nd Company to prevent, by its firing, any movement of the enemy southwards. To the 1st Company, I gave orders to go towards Hallem-baye and strengthen the outpost at Lixhe and, at the same time, to observe how the land lay towards the north.

Presently the 2nd Company had to undergo such violent firing from musketry and machine-guns that Captain François, who was in command, was obliged to evacuate certain houses along the Meuse, as the walls were pierced by the balls. Captain Burgh-raeve, too, in command of the 1st Company, sent me word that the German artillery was sending a veritable storm of shells of every calibre on to the troops that were defending the Lixhe ford, and that the men, lying down under each fresh burst, were unable to reply, and still more unable to observe the country round. It was, therefore, possible for the Germans to cross the Meuse without being seen by them so that he could not warn me. "Hold out," I replied, "it is all right!" At the same time, I continued encouraging my brave men who were resisting energetically at Visé.

By 4.30, the development of the enemy's front was getting more and more extensive. The weakness of my forces, part of which could do nothing on account

of the adverse firing, made me decide to evacuate my position, under cover, at the different points occupied, of our rear-guard. This retreat took place in perfect order, without the enemy being aware of it. The 1st Company, in spite of its dangerous situation, also succeeded in withdrawing, group by group. The Lixhe post was now the only one to cause us any anxiety.

Crouching down in the beet-root fields, our comrades awaited a lull in the steel whirlwind, in order to get up and make a rush forward. Fifty yards farther on, they threw themselves down again. The German artillery increased its firing, the earth shook, and clouds of dust flew about everywhere. With intense emotion, I watched this terrible race. Finally, thank God, they were all there with us. The soldiers had their coats, shakos, and kits pierced with balls. Two men saw the bicycles they were holding shattered by shells. By the most unheard-of good luck, not one of them was wounded.

Our total losses amounted to two men killed and ten wounded. The inhabitants of Visé told us afterward that the enemy had suffered greatly, and that a number of carts took away their wounded.



CHAPTER II

The First German Flag Taken

(August 5, 1914)

**FROM THE ACCOUNT GIVEN BY DEPUTY STAFF MAJOR
COLLYNS OF THE 12TH LINE REGIMENT**

On leaving Visé, I went to Milmort, where, on August 5th, I received an order from General Leman to go immediately to Wandre and to prevent, at any cost, the Germans crossing the bridge over the Meuse.

On arriving, I made a brief survey of the position. As my Battalion was only four hundred strong, the defence meant principally the construction of barricades and the utilising of houses and walls for firing obliquely and from all sides over the bridge of the Meuse, over the canal bridge to the west, and over the roads leading to these bridges. With feverish activity, the soldiers set to work. In the various houses indicated, they broke the window-panes, arranged the bedding and sacks of earth against the windows, in order to shelter those who were firing. They then dragged carts, carried planks of wood and barrels, and all kinds of other material, to the bridge over the Meuse, piling everything up in such a way as to leave only a narrow passage, scarcely sufficient for one man to cross at a time.

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A barricade was then put up on the road from Herstal to Vivegnis. The walls of the cemetery, a huge rectangle between the road and the canal, were pierced to form loopholes and so transformed into a regular redoubt. In a very short time, my men were posted behind the windows of the houses and the loopholes of the cemetery, with their Mausers ready, on the look-out for the enemy.

These preparations evidently interfered with the plans of the Germans and their spies set to work to move us away. One of their agents transmitted to me, by telephone, an order from the Staff to leave Wandre. As I had received an order to defend the bridge at any cost, I was greatly surprised and asked at once for communication with Headquarters.

"I have given no such instructions," answered General Leman, in reply to my question. "Is Collyns still there and can I count on him?" I assured the General that I should on no account leave there without his express order to do so.

On returning to the bridge, to my great amazement, I saw some men taking away the carts which formed our barricade. I called out to them furiously and asked what they were doing. They informed me that they were merely obeying an order they had received from the Superintendent of Police. I asked the latter what he meant by interfering.

"There is no knowing what to do," he answered, angrily. "The General has just telephoned to me to have the bridge cleared."

"Look here," I replied, "I am going to give an order now to the sentinels to shoot down every man who touches the barricades, and I shall hold you responsible for what happens."

My energetic attitude took effect and there was no further attempt to disobey my orders.

The remainder of the day, August 5th, passed without any other incident. Fearing a night attack, I arranged for a new system of lighting. I had some piles of straw soaked in tar and placed at various points, out of sight of the enemy, giving orders to the sentinels to set fire to them in case of an alert.

No information reached me except that the enemy was bombarding the Forts violently. As a matter of fact, my position at the Wandre bridge constituted a second line of defence, for, at a certain distance in front of us, fortress troops occupied the ground between the Pontisse Fort and the Meuse. I had not much faith in the value of these soldiers, as they belonged to our former recruiting system.

They had left their regiments years ago and had only been under arms again four days. My estimation turned out to be true. At midnight, a sustained firing was suddenly heard in front of us and, very soon after, the fortress troops endeavoured to reach the town by the roads I was defending. I rushed forward to meet them and ordered them to return to their position, threatening to shoot those who disobeyed. They started back, but the darkness prevented my seeing whether they really returned to their posts, or whether they slipped round on our left flank.

Towards one o'clock, my sentinels fired and, immediately, the bonfires were lighted. An intense firing then took place, principally from the Herstal-Vivegnis road. The German musketry and machine-guns replied. A few minutes later, the firing was less intense and was heard farther away. The enemy had been obliged to retreat, but, before long returned in

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greater force, by parallel streets. Once more our firing compelled them to retreat. They then rushed into the gardens, passed through the houses and advanced along the street which cuts the Herstal-Vivegnis road perpendicularly. This street was simply swept from one end to the other by our soldiers, hidden in the houses skirting the right of the square. After suffering frightful losses, the Germans were obliged to escape and take shelter in the gardens. Fresh troops appeared and attempted to force the passage. The attacks continued uninterruptedly. Mingled with the sound of the orders, of the shouts and cries of "Forward!" could be heard the firing of the guns and the dull thud of bodies falling to the ground. Whole groups of German foot-soldiers were lying in the streets, at equal distances, their hands clenching the butt end of their guns, guarding their ranks even in death. They lay there, showing their breasts, torn open by the balls, and their hideous wounds. Blood trickled over the footpaths and over the roads, there was blood on the fronts of the houses, blood everywhere. Huge flames from the bonfires lighted up this scene of carnage. The flames danced, jumped, mingled with each other in golden wreaths, throwing long shadows which seemed to be climbing and running along the walls. . . .

Gradually, the adversaries' vigour weakened, their efforts diminished, and there were long intervals between the attacks. As soon as the heads of the assaulting columns came within reach of our firing, they were mown down. The rest disbanded and, rushing in all directions, hid in the gardens and cellars. During a lull, a few of my brave men explored the surrounding district and, a few minutes later, the

soldier Lange brought me the flag of the 89th Regiment of Mecklenburg Grenadiers, which he had found just below the houses facing the Vivegnis road. The Colonel, the Adjutant-Major, the standard bearer, and a number of officers were lying there near their glorious trophy. I seized the flag and went forward to my soldiers crying: "Victory! Victory!" There was wild enthusiasm and, spontaneously, they burst out with our national anthem: the *Brabançonne*, and shouts of "Long live the King! Long live Belgium! Long live the Major!" The officers hurried to me to congratulate me and, I may as well confess it, in a state of excitement that made my soldiers forget all hierarchy, they rushed to me and grasped my hand. Ah, the brave fellows!

The firing became less and less violent and, towards eight in the morning, the enemy beat a final retreat. A strange man-hunting chase then began in the little gardens of the houses. There were Boches hidden in the bushes, crouching down behind heaps of leaves. Some of them held up their hands, crying, "Comrades, do not shoot!" Others, on the contrary, fought to the last. In one garden, a dozen of them refused stubbornly to surrender, and were massacred. After confiding the flag to Engineer Hiard, who undertook to take it to General Leman, I went through the streets of the town. Stretcher-bearers were carrying away the Germans or dressing their wounds. Near the square, I witnessed a very painful scene. As one of the stretcher-bearers approached, a German officer raised his pistol. Our man snatched it from him, but, whilst he was calling one of his colleagues to help him, the Boche drew out his pocketknife and cut his own throat. There were helmets, swords, guns,

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and fragments of all kinds of things strewing the ground and I could not resist the temptation of sending a little collection to the Liège Town Hall.

Just at that moment, I heard some alarming news. I was told that there had been an attempt to assassinate General Leman; that the Germans had entered Liège, that they already occupied Herstal, and that they threatened to bar our way. In spite of our success, our situation was extremely perilous. Whatever might happen, I had given my solemn promise to General Leman that I would hold the bridge and I was determined to keep my word. I sent word to the Governor telling him what my position was. I told him that the Germans had retreated and were probably within a certain distance of my lines, that I saw the possibility of going forward and throwing them back under the firing of the Pontisse Fort, but that I could not undertake this attack, unless I could be sure that the heights of Wandre, situated on the right bank, were in the possession of our troops, as otherwise I should be exposed to the enemy crossing the bridge and getting at us from the other side. I sent three cyclists, one after the other, to Headquarters but, to my great disappointment, I received no answer and so did not dare leave our shelter.

Towards ten o'clock, Captain Grossman arrived. He was formerly an officer of my Battalion and now, since the mobilisation, he was in the 2nd Battalion of the 32nd Line Regiment.

"Major," he said, "I was in position on the right bank of the Meuse and I have received orders to fall back. I heard that you were on the other bank and I have come to place myself at your disposal. Do not pack me off again, Major. Make use of

my hundred and fifty men." This help was a godsend.

"Grossman," I answered, "this is just like you. I am very thankful you have come. We succeeded at Visé and we have taken a flag here and a number of prisoners. I will give you an opportunity of doing something worth doing. The situation is as follows: The enemy is retreating in front of us, but my left is threatened and we are threatened from behind. I also know that a fairly important German force is in Rhées cemetery, and may be able to turn round us. Go by Basprial towards the heights, clear the ground of what you find there, hold the troops which now occupy Rhées, at all costs, and endeavour to make an impression on them. I fancy you will do a good stroke there, Grossman."

The Commander started off at once with his Company and, towards one in the afternoon, he crossed the bridge again, followed by four hundred prisoners, among whom were seven officers, Lieutenant Count von Moltke included, the grand-nephew of the famous Marshal.

"I congratulate you heartily, Grossman," I said, "and, by way of reward, you shall take the prisoners to Liège."

A few minutes later, I received notice that General Bertrand was coming with his brigade to the left bank, that I was to cover his passage by the Wandre bridge and form, afterwards, the rear-guard of his troops, which were retiring in the direction of Ans. . . .

CHAPTER III

The Attack on the Offices of the 3rd Division

(LIÈGE, August 6, 1914)

FROM ACCOUNTS BY GENERAL MAJOR STASSIN, COMMANDERS
VINCOTTE AND BUISSET, CAPTAINS LHERMITE AND
RENARD, ADJUTANT BURLET AND PRIVATE
PONCELET

THE aspect of St.-Foi Street on August 5, 1914, will never be forgotten by those who were there on that date. Officers and soldiers, covered with dust, came hurrying along from the Quays and from St. Leonard Street and Defrecheux Street, towards the offices of the Military Headquarters of the fortified position. With feverish haste, they hurried along through the crowds of young men in the street, who, with their tri-coloured cockade in their buttonholes, were shouting and singing in their enthusiasm, for they had all come to offer their life for their country. Everyone was in high spirits, as the greatest confidence and certainty of victory reigned supreme. The various groups were chatting and joking with each other, and the arrival and departure of the military couriers were greeted with amusing sallies. "Bring me back a helmet!" called out one man. "I would

rather have a lance to make a hat-pin with for my wife!" cried another. Bursts of laughter greeted every speech. Young men, rich and poor, were all there together, fraternising with each other, all actuated by a fine burst of patriotic enthusiasm. Here and there, forming a contrast to this careless gaiety, were the farmers and cattle-dealers, in their smocks, with their iron-tipped sticks. They all looked more or less anxious and were discussing gruffly the requisition prices.

"Make way there!" called out a voice authoritatively.

A gendarme suddenly appeared, carrying a pigeon crouching in a woman's hat. He was followed by a wretched-looking woman in tears, with dishevelled hair, and by a shifty-looking individual. Both of them had a shrinking attitude as they were hustled along. The man kept repeating in a mechanical way: "Let us go! Let us go!"

"Down with all spies!" yelled the crowd and fists threatened the two Boches, as they disappeared under the archway. Several carts, under the care of a sub-officer, followed. They were full of weapons and war equipment of various kinds. The news soon spread that fifteen thousand guns had just been discovered in a cellar in St. Marguerite Street and more than fifty thousand lances, saddles, revolvers, and machine-guns in a house in Jonckeu Street, which, from cellar to attic, had been converted into a veritable arsenal. A thrill of anger ran through the whole crowd.

Inside the house which was the Headquarters of the Staff, feverish activity reigned. Night and day, without ceasing and without any rest, the officers had

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been at work, for, we may as well confess it, we had had too much faith in the loyalty of our neighbours, and the ultimatum had taken us by surprise. Everything had to be thought of and everything organised within a few days. Motor-cars, horses, cattle, and fodder had to be requisitioned. Houses in the firing line would have to be destroyed, trenches and shelters must be constructed. There were, in fact, thousands of things to be done, in order to complete and improve the defence of the Forts.

The telephone bell kept ringing and couriers rushed off every minute along the various routes, carrying orders from the Governor to the various points threatened.

Towards midnight, St.-Foi Street was silent again. At the Military Headquarters, the officers continued their work and, at the door of the building, a bureau carriage and several motor-cars were stationed.

Suddenly, shouts and cries of "Hurrah!" were to be heard. Surrounded by a crowd, wild with delight, an open motor-car appeared.

Standing on the cushions, Engineer Hiard was to be seen waving a German flag. It was the flag of the 89th Regiment of the Mecklenburg Grenadiers, which a soldier, Fernand Lange, had just taken at the Wandre bridge, at Herstal. Windows opened, and faces, with eyes puffed up with sleep, appeared. Bare arms were to be seen waving handkerchiefs, and the enthusiasm was beyond all words.

Gradually the tumult ceased once more and there was silence again. Day broke and a dim light illuminated the street. Suddenly a motor-car appeared through the morning mist, and two lancers, who were seated in it, cried out, "The English are here!"

Behind them were five German officers, preceding soldiers in grey uniform marching in two ranks and shouldering guns.¹

A crowd of men and women of the people accompanied them, shouting joyfully: "Long live the English!" Commander Marchand was standing in the doorway of the Headquarters building, smoking a cigarette. He looked at the procession in amazement, wondering whether the men were truce-bearers or deserters. He advanced a few steps to meet them in a hesitating way.

Inside the building, the officers were still at work, taking no notice of the noise in the street. By chance, Commander Delannoy went to the window. His office is on the second floor and looks on to St. Leonard Street. He saw about thirty Germans in this street. He rushed back to the landing shouting: "The Germans are here!" Commander Vinçotte, who was on the first floor, loaded his revolver and rushed down the stairs. Commander Buisset and Lieutenant Renard followed him.

In the meantime, the five German officers walked slowly up to Commander Marchand and, putting their hands behind their backs, armed themselves with a revolver in the right hand and a dagger in the left. When within two yards of the Commander, their chief officer, a tall, stout man, whom we learnt afterwards was Major Count Joachim von Alvensleben, spoke to the Belgian officer in English. No one knows what he said. Marchand suddenly shouted: "You shall never pass!" All the German officers, feigning no longer, fired immediately. Marchand

¹ Some of these soldiers belonged to the 7th Regiment of Chasseurs.

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and Vinçotte fired back. Three German officers fell. Alvensleben rushed to the door to enter the house, but Vinçotte forthwith fired four shots at him, and the Major fell forward head first. The last German officer fell at his side, brought down by Captain Lhermite with the butt end of his gun. Following the example of their chiefs, the enemy soldiers opened fire, holding the butt end of their guns on their hips. They aimed badly and the shots grazed the walls. Commander Sauber sprang out of the carriage standing at the door, and discharged his Browning on the assailants. A German slipped behind the motor-cars and aimed at Sauber from the foot-path. He missed the Commander, but hit Marchand, who fell down, wounded at the back of the neck and in the chest.

At this moment, about twenty Germans turned the corner of the street and rushed to the rescue of their countrymen. Hidden behind a barrier, they fired into the windows and entrance hall. Colonel Stassin, Chief of the Staff, was working with General Leman in a back room of the ground floor. At the sound of the shooting, he rushed along the hall and, in spite of a shower of bullets, out into the street. A terrible sight awaited him there. Commander Marchand was lying in a pool of blood, and four Belgian officers were fighting courageously with about thirty Germans. The Colonel did not hesitate a moment. Before all things, the Governor must be saved. He returned to the office and took the General to the Royal foundry which adjoins the buildings. Helped by Captain de Krahe and Captain Lebbe, the two chiefs scaled the wall, between the houses, and, by taking St. Leonard Street, reached the Vivegnis station. From

there, they went by carriage to the Loncin Fort, where the Governor remained.

In the meantime, Commander Vingotte, in order to cover the General's retreat, called together the soldiers and the gendarmes of the Guard and led them to the attack, seconded by Captain Buisset, Captain Lhermite, and Lieutenant Renard. With a gun which he found in the street, Commander Hauteclerc joined in the attack. The Belgians were ten against thirty, but, in spite of this, they sustained the fight with advantage to themselves. On their knees on the ground, crouching down on the footpath, or sheltered behind doors, they avoided the enemy's balls, whilst their well-aimed firing brought down many victims. When about ten were killed, the others, most of whom were wounded, took flight. One alone, the last of them all, posted opposite the Headquarters, continued firing at the windows. Adjutant Burlet, from the balcony above, brought him down. Undecided which way to escape, the Germans stopped at the corner of St. Leonard Street. A few of them waved the white flag.

"Forward!" cried Vingotte, at the head of his courageous little troop, rushing off in pursuit of them. In St. Leonard Street, two more Germans were killed. Unfortunately the Belgians only had their revolvers and, thanks to this, the remaining Boches escaped.

After placing men to guard each end of the street, the officers returned to Headquarters and carried the body of Commander Marchand into a room on the ground floor. The unfortunate officer gave no sign of life. He had a frightful wound at the back of his neck and a great clot of blood at his chest. A second victim, a gendarme, named Houba, was placed at his

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side. In an adjoining room the wounds of two soldiers were quickly dressed. The bodies of the enemy were then searched. In Major von Alvensleben's pocket, a 1/60,000 map of Liège was found, on which an itinerary was traced in pencil from Hermée to Coron-Meuse. Had the Germans really followed that itinerary and had they managed to come unseen across the waste land of the Vignes and so enter the town? It is possible, but it is quite certain that their departure was as mysterious as their arrival, as they were neither seen to enter nor leave the town at any point of the fortified region. It is much more probable that they were hidden inside the town when they prepared this expedition. The following rumoured version of the affair is much the more probable explanation. A few days before the declaration of war, it is said that some Danes took a flat at Thier, Liège. On the evening of August 5th, they paid their bill to their landlady, an honest, unsuspecting woman, telling her that the town did not seem safe and that they intended leaving the following night. Towards three in the morning, she heard a noise and, getting up, went to see them off. To her amazement, she saw that they were wearing German uniforms. Without attempting any explanation, the Boches made off. Were these men Alvensleben and his friends?

Whatever were the means employed, the attempt on the offices of the 3rd Division was a most daring exploit, and if it had not been for the heroic resistance of the Staff officers and of the soldiers on guard, the Germans would certainly have succeeded in capturing the Governor of the stronghold and in getting hold of the documents concerning the defence.



CHAPTER IV

The Sart-Tilman Combat

**FROM AN ACCOUNT GIVEN BY PÈRE DE GROOTE, ARMY CHAPLAIN
TO THE 1ST REGIMENT OF UNMOUNTED CHASSEURS AND
COMPLETED BY MAJOR N—— OF THE 4TH
REGIMENT OF UNMOUNTED CHASSEURS**

ON August 4, 1914, the inhabitants of Charleroi crowded to the streets, windows, and balconies to cheer the 1st Regiment of Chasseurs which was starting, preceded by the band, to take part in the defence of Belgium.

"Long live the King! Hurrah for Belgium! Hurrah for the soldiers!"

Every man shouted the words that came first to his lips, and the soldiers, with bright eyes and smiles, marched proudly along, under a shower of flowers and tricolour ribbons.

Pushing through the ranks, a woman held a little girl of three or four years of age up to one of the volunteers, and the father, with tears in his eyes, kissed his child for the last time, amidst the frantic cheering of the crowd.

Just at this moment, the people rushed forward on to the horse-road, surrounding the soldiers, and commenced filling their pockets with tobacco, chocolate, and a hundred other dainties. The officers, half-

laughing and half angry, endeavoured to re-establish order. As for me, I had great difficulty to get along, for people I did not know at all clutched me, grasped my hands and, recommending their sons to my care, forced money upon me with the words, "Take it, take it, it is for the soldiers." I managed to get free of the mob and rushed home. To my great annoyance, my appointment as army chaplain had not yet arrived. What was I to do? The soldiers wanted me to be with them and it seemed to me that, at such a time, I could not desert them. I did not hesitate long, but rushed off to the station and took my seat in a compartment with eight officers.

After two hours' journey, the train stopped and we were at Huy. After organising the bridge-head and protecting the destruction of the Engis and Hermalle bridges, the regiment was sent by train to Liège in the afternoon of August 5th. We arrived at the Longdoz station and were greeted here, too, with cheers. The enthusiasm increased when the crowd discovered a priest in the ranks. We were stationed on the road which leads from Jupille to Bellaire, as reserves, behind the 11th Brigade, which was then fighting furiously in the vicinity of the Barchon Fort. The soldiers piled arms and lay down on the roadside. Presently a line regiment passed. From horseback, I addressed a few patriotic words to the brave fellows, who seemed to appreciate what I said. They knelt down and asked for my blessing. I prayed that God would give them the victory.

Towards evening, we returned to Liège, went through to Fragnée and halted in a meadow. It was then ten o'clock. I lay down on the grass by Commander Henseval. I had not closed my eyes for

three nights and was dead tired. The Commander, who was preparing his stylograph, in order to write to his wife, noticed my exhaustion. "Go to sleep," he said; "in case anything happens, I will wake you." I did not need telling twice, but alas, ten minutes later, there was an energetic call: "To arms! To arms!"

I sprang to my feet and rushed forward to find out what had occurred. The German Staff, having failed in its plans to the east, was employing one of its favourite manœuvres and developing action by means of its left wing, in the direction of a more vulnerable sector, that of Embourg-Boncelles. From our position at Fragnée, we could already see the light of the bursting shells, here and there, in the direction of Boncelles.

We were sent with the 4th Chasseurs to Ougrée. I was at the head of the column, behind General Massart. It was raining in torrents and the water was streaming down our faces. This mattered little to us and we continued our march along the white road bordered by two rows of trees.

Suddenly, a motor-car arrived, travelling at full speed. Commander Marchand was in it. He belonged to Lieutenant-General Leman's Staff.

"Our men are out-flanked at Sart-Tilman," he said to the General; "the Chasseurs must defend the hamlet at any cost."

"You mean a sacrifice?"

"Yes, General."

"Good, agreed! Forward!"

The commander of the regiment, Colonel Jacquet, went quickly from rank to rank of the soldiers, stimulating their enthusiasm and telling them how proud he was to be marching at their head. As he wished

to add example to precept, he went straight to the vanguard and advanced cautiously along, for the ground was hilly and it was quite possible that enemy patrols might have penetrated there. Sart-Tilman is the key of a wooded table-land, the entrance to which was crowned by a series of redoubts and hastily prepared trenches, but the firing range was not sufficiently cleared. It was nearly midnight when we passed through the hamlet.

The Major of the 1st Battalion placed three companies between the redoubts, facing the St. Jean and Sclessin woods and kept one company back as a reserve. The noise from this side was deafening. Everything seemed to be rumbling together, guns, machine-guns, and cannons, and, in the midst of the darkness, the bursting of the shrapnels illuminated the sky with their blood-red lights. To the right and left, the Boncelles and Embourg Forts seemed to be wrapped round with a girdle of flames. From time to time, we could hear, in the still night, the doleful sound of the fifes sounding the rally and the march forward. It was a grand and thrilling sight. It was war in all its tragic beauty. The deployment of the Chasseurs was carried out just as though it had been on the drilling ground. They climbed the slopes in files. Here and there, lay the dead body of a Belgian soldier.

"Halt!" came the order and, when once they were established in an advantageous position and sheltered as much as possible, they fired by guess and for a good reason. It was impossible to see a single one of the enemy soldiers. They were all hidden in the trenches and their heads scarcely came up to the parapet.

Suddenly, some soldiers, dragging with them their machine-guns, rushed away, crying, "The Germans are there. Each man for himself!" It was impossible to stop them and there was a veritable helter-skelter. We discovered afterwards that these men were Germans, disguised as Belgian soldiers, in order to create a panic amongst us. There was a slight hesitation and then our officers rushed amongst the sharp-shooters and led them forward, to the positions they were to occupy. A violent musketry fire greeted them, coming chiefly from the St. Jean wood, a part of which had not been felled. Scattered about, our Chasseurs continued to advance, sheltering behind one tree after another, in spite of the ceaseless firing. The balls whizzed along and, with a dry crackle, cut down the branches or entered the trunks of the trees. I can still see a young Corporal, who had been hit in the head and chest with a ball and was red with blood, walking towards Major Le Doseray.

"I have done my duty, Major," he said, "haven't I? Are you satisfied with me?" The Major had only just time to grasp his hand, when the poor fellow sank down. I rushed to him, but he was dead.

The battle developed with great violence. The German scouts, who preceded their columns, were driven off; but our company to the right, under Captain Commander Rochette, had suffered terrible losses and he asked for reinforcements. The reserve of the 1st Battalion and two companies of the 2nd Battalion soon formed part of the chain, and the struggle continued until break of day with alternative calm and violence. The Germans found a way of creeping into our thickets, thus obliging our regiment reserve

patrols to explore our positions on each side and even at our back.

The Chasseurs were congratulating themselves on having accomplished their mission and they believed that the victory was theirs, when, just at dawn, on our left wing, the Boches waved white flags and the bugle rang out, "1st Chasseurs, cease firing!" Our officers were amazed and, for an instant, our firing stopped. We understood immediately, though, that it was only another ruse and that the Germans had imitated our bugle call. The fight began once more, and very soon after, groups of the enemy who, during the darkness had crept into some of the Sart-Tilman houses that were still intact, took our trenches and our explorers from behind. There was a moment's consternation, as one of our men fell face downwards at the Colonel's feet, declaring that he had been shot in the back by his comrades. By way of restoring confidence, the Commander of the 2nd Battalion sent a platoon to reconnoitre in the direction of the Cense-Rouge farm. It came back without discovering anything, after losing some men who were also shot in the back. Another platoon inspected the field of oats adjoining the farm. Our Adjutant-Major went himself into the gardens. In the houses, there were soldiers dressed remarkably like our Chasseurs. The Colonel told them to come out and join in the shooting. They refused and we broke down the doors, but the point blank firing of these imitation Chasseurs obliged our men to fall back. Captain Fleuracker, Captain Rochette, Lieutenant Sohier, Lieutenant Pereaux, and Lieutenant Dufrane were killed. Our reserve had to be withdrawn and the houses had to be attacked one after another. We

were not supplied with incendiary and asphyxiating means, as the Germans were.

The battle continued to rage and some German machine-guns, stationed four hundred yards north-east of Sart-Tilman and protected by barbed wire, fired volleys into the hamlet and its neighbourhood. Captain Vergeynst, followed by a few courageous men, rushed forward and succeeded in bringing down the Boche commander and his gunners, but, unfortunately, the losses in our ranks were considerable. The regimentary reserve, which for a time had been dispersed, now rallied round the officers, whilst the first line executed a furious counter-attack. This continued until towards five o'clock, when the 3rd Battalion, with the flag, the machine-guns, and the artillery of the 15th Brigade came from the St. Laurent wood and began to attack the trenches we had had to leave. These were soon retaken.

Just at this moment Captain Henseval, commanding the 3rd Company of the 3rd Battalion, noticed a white flag in the midst of a group of Germans who, with hands up, were crying, "Kamarades! Kamarades!" A sign was made for them to approach, but, as they did not move, Henseval, accompanied by about ten men, advanced towards them in order to take them. He had almost reached them, when the Germans flung themselves down on the ground, discovering a machine-gun which mowed down the little group of Belgians, including the Captain, who received several balls in his chest. Of all this brave group, only one man escaped.

To the left, in the direction of Boncelles, grey masses could be seen treading down the beet-root fields. They were the 73rd and 74th regiments of German

Infantry, marching in close ranks, shouting "Hurrah!" and attacking the Fort. Our shells and machine-guns made great gaps in their columns. At the command of their officers, the Battalions closed up the gaps and continued their march forward. Three times their lines were broken and three times they re-formed them. Finally, decimated, they broke up near the moats. Only a hundred men remained on foot. Without their officers, and completely demoralised, they waved a white flag. Captain Lefert, in command of the Fort, and Lieutenant Montois, climbed on to the benches and, when the Germans saw them, they held up their hands. Just at that moment, two shots were fired from somewhere and the Captain fell, a ball in both thighs. The Germans gave themselves up all the same, and disappeared in Indian file inside the Fort. The assault had failed and the enemy fell back towards seven o'clock and attempted nothing more than a few counter-attacks at intervals.

The Chasseurs were masters of the place and their flag flew over Sart-Tilman.

I went out at once to the battle-field. What an abominable sight it was! Around the trenches, were the dead bodies of Belgians and Germans, piled up and forming parapets three yards high. I went down into one of the trenches; it was a pool of blood, with a heap of bodies entangled with each other. Alas, how many of our brave young Chasseurs were there, poor fellows whom anxious mothers were expecting back home! Stepping over the dead bodies, I dressed the wounds of our men and said a few words to encourage them. They were resigned and bore their suffering without any complaint, but what anguish I read in the eyes that were already becoming dim!

How fervently they clasped their hands together in a last prayer!

When I spoke a few words in their own language to the German wounded, what a deafening noise began! They cried, moaned, pitied themselves and, imagining that I was one of their countrymen, gave me farewell messages for their relatives, their wives, and their children. They clung to me, kissed my hands, beseeched me not to leave them. I hurried away from this hell and made my way up and down the battle-field, in search of wounded men to relieve and dying ones to whom to administer the last sacraments. There in front of me, lay more than five thousand soldiers of the Brandenburg, Hanover, and Pomeranian Corps. The ground was covered with a grey cloak, relieved here and there by the dark patches of our Chasseurs' uniforms. From this field of suffering, could be heard groans, sobs, and the death-rattle. It was horrible, frightful! Lying on his back, with a fearful wound, a poor young volunteer of some seventeen years old, was calling out, piteously, "Mother, mother, I want to see you!" I knelt down beside him and the poor boy held out a silver coin of fifty centimes to me. "It is all I have," he said; "I want to send it to the church where I was baptised."

I was moving on, when a Commander suddenly forbade me to go forward. "As long as there are any wounded, I have a mission to fulfil," I protested. He finally yielded and gave me two soldiers for protection. This precaution was wise, as, a minute later, a German officer, who appeared to be dead, fired two shots from his revolver at me, but fortunately he failed to hit his mark. After this I was extremely cautious in approaching any officers of the

enemy. However serious their wounds might be, they always clutched their swords in disdainful silence, in order to avoid the humiliation of being disarmed. "I wish to be buried with my sword and decorations," said a dying German Captain. I promised him that his wish should be respected and he died contented.

With the most admirable devotion, the nurses carried the wounded soldiers to the ambulances and, very soon, a long convoy was moving along the Angleur road. At every jerk, cries and groans could be heard.

Towards evening, I was alone on the battle-field. A gloomy twilight lit up this plain of the dead. Disagreeable odours mingled with the sweet scent of the woods. There was not a murmur, not a rustle or sound, everywhere peace and silence! On the torn-up, hollowed-out ground, were heaps and heaps of dark-looking, horrible terrifying things. . . .

CHAPTER V

The Retreat of the 800

BY CAPTAIN — OF THE 14TH LINE REGIMENT

AMONG the episodes of the war, there is one which, thanks to the brilliant result obtained, deserves mention in the glorious pages of our history. It is the retreat carried out by two infantry battalions, the one of the 34th Line Regiment, and the other belonging to the fortress. The episode occurred eight days after the occupation of Liège by the German troops when the place appeared to be completely invested. The 1st Battalion of the 34th Line Regiment, after organising the defence works of Werihet, in the Bar-chon-Pontisse sector, was sent during the morning of August 4th, to the Embourg-Chaufontaine interval, with the mission to defend the valley of the Vesdre, in case of any attacks on the Vesdre road or on the Ninane road. Retrenchments were quickly constructed, ditches dug, and quantities of sacks of earth piled up. In short, the interval was soon transformed into a regular fortress. The Commander, on hearing that the enemy was advancing on Liège and had sent out reconnaissances in the direction of Chaufontaine, ordered a patrol to explore the Rochette wood to the north-east of the Fort. This patrol returned towards

four in the afternoon, bringing Baron von Zutfen, Lieutenant of the 2nd Chasseurs of Ziethen, as prisoner. This feat was cheered, and it was with lively curiosity that our soldiers gathered round the first German prisoner.

The order to retreat given, on August 6th, to the troops fighting in the intervals round the Liège position did not affect this Battalion, so that all day long, on August 5th, 6th, and 7th, the men were employed in completing the defence of the valley. During the morning of August 8th, the news spread that German troops had entered Liège. Measures were immediately taken for repulsing any aggression from the town side. It was hoped that, even if the enemy had succeeded in penetrating, it might only have been by forcing the Fléron, Evegnée, and Barchon intervals. If this were the case, though, the situation was critical for the Belgian Corps, and the Commander was surprised that he had received no instructions. From another side, persistent rumours were afloat, announcing the arrival of the campaigning army through Waremmé, reinforced by a French contingent. What were we to believe? Messengers sent to General Leman did not return and the days passed by in anxious waiting. Every instant we had news to the effect that the circle was getting more and more hard pressed. Officers and soldiers were anxiously wondering whether they would be able to hold out. On the 10th, 11th, and 12th, there had already been various skirmishes between detachments of the enemy who had made use of the Red Cross flag in order to approach, and patrols of a company in retrenchment on the Vedre road, near the second milestone. A few enemy prisoners were taken.

On the 12th, at 4.30 P.M., a terrible bombardment of the Chaudfontaine Fort commenced, which never ceased until 9.30. The following morning at five o'clock, the cannonading recommenced most violently, the Fort was blown up, and the enemy surrounding it rushed from every side to the assault. The Embourg Fort met with the same fate. Finally on the morning of the 13th, towards nine o'clock, a courier arrived at Château Nagelmackers, where the Commander was staying, with an order from General Leman calling for the troops at Awans.

Just as the 2nd Company, which had been guarding the Chaudfontaine and Ninane roads, was setting out, it was surrounded by an enemy column and taken prisoner. The two remaining companies climbed the hill and reached the Henne Château and the Basse-Mehagne farm. On arriving there, the 1st Company, which formed the rear-guard and was being attacked on its flank by a detachment coming from Chênée, executed a helter-skelter firing on the adversary, whose shooting gradually became less and less intense. Finally, the enemy retreated, so that the little Belgian column was able to continue its march towards Embourg, where it rejoined the 3rd Company as well as a fortress battalion, which was also without instructions and was endeavouring to escape. These various troops, after crossing the Ourthe, some in little boats and others by a chance foot-bridge thrown across the river opposite Rousseau Island, climbed the Sart-Tilman, keeping by the Boficelles Fort, which was already being watched by the enemy, passed through the village in ruins, driving back the sentinel occupying the Vecquée woods and, just escaping a cavalry detachment, finally reached the Communes.

Our poor soldiers were thoroughly exhausted; they had been overpowered by the heat and tortured by hunger and thirst. Fortunately the population, although somewhat taken aback by their arrival, did all in its power to supply them with provisions.

The retreat then continued in the direction of the Val St. Lambert bridge, which, according to information received, was being guarded by about a score of men. Although obstructed by a train and various accessory defences, it could still be crossed in Indian file. All measures were taken for a bayonet attack and, in the middle of the night, our men advanced silently. To their amazement there was no one there. What had become of the troops which had charge of the defence of the bridge? Had they made off? This remained a mystery. The crossing of the bridge took some time, but the men were encouraged by this incident and the column set off once more, passing through Flémalle and Mons-Crotteux. After a most difficult march, beset by ambushes of all kinds, it finally arrived at Awans-Bierzet, on August 14th, at about 2.30. It took up its quarters here, whilst awaiting orders from General Leman. The enemy had been seen in the neighbourhood, so that the roads were guarded and urgent measures of security were taken. Various incidents took place before the end of the day and German detachments, which were approaching the Loncin Fort, had to be dispersed, causing us some losses.

From information received from various sources, we gathered that the enemy was endeavouring to cut off the retreat. In case this were so, there was nothing left but to fight to the last man. The soldiers and their officers were very much troubled, as they feared

they had not rendered all the services to their country which it had a right to expect from its defenders. The bombarding of the Loncin Fort began at 3 P.M. and increased rapidly in intensity.

To those military men who had been present at the fall of Chaudfontaine, it seemed certain that Loncin would share the same fate. There appeared to be only one thing to do and that was to join, at all costs, the fighting army, certain elements of which were then in the Huy suburbs. After such intense nervous excitement as they had just undergone, after so much fighting and such long marches, the men were exhausted. Thanks to the rousing words of their chiefs and to their own earnest wish to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy, they decided to make a supreme effort in order to escape from the vice, the jaws of which were gradually closing round them. The posts were withdrawn silently, between 8 and 9 P.M., and the column, assembled behind the church, was prepared to take its fate into its hands. The commanders of the Hollogne and Flémalle Forts were informed that friendly troops would soon be passing within their zone of action, in an attempt to join the army in campaign.

A somewhat extraordinary itinerary was chosen, in order to avoid the most frequented roads. The column was to go from Awans-Bierzet to Hollogne, Mons-Crotteux, Horion-Hozémont, Haneffe, Chapon-Seraing, Villers-le-Bouillet, and Huy. In spite of fatigue, which made this night march excessively difficult, not a single man dragged behind, not a single one fell out. Each one of them was determined to carry out the plan decided on. In the early dawn, the column was within sight of Haneffe, which was

evidently in the power of the enemy, as a platoon of Uhlans was to be seen patrolling the country round. Fortunately this was not an important detachment and, after a feeble resistance, it was driven out of the village.

The Belgian troop continued its march southwards. At seven o'clock, it surprised a flank guard of the same cavalry bivouacking in a field. At a distance of about five hundred yards, the elements at the head of the column opened fire and the Uhlans, without even having time to mount, took flight in all directions. They were impeded by their riding boots and spurs. Some of them stumbled and fell and, on getting up, started off faster than before. This excited our men to hurry along in pursuit of them. Two of the least agile of the horsemen were caught and taken prisoners. The horses took fright, broke loose, and galloped all over the country. The sight would have amused us if it had not been for the dead and wounded who were lying on the ground.

The valiant little troop now continued its way in the direction of Chapon-Seraing, where the soldiers had refreshments and then went on to Villers-le-Bouillet, which was to have been the end of their trying march, as, according to our latest information, the 28th Line Regiment was there. Once more we were to have a cruel disappointment, as, on arriving, we found that the troops which had been occupying the village had left the previous evening.

Fortunately Huy was only five miles distant. Another effort was made, and slowly, with bleeding feet, exhausted by fatigue and half dead with hunger and thirst, the soldiers, leaning on sticks which they had torn from the trees on the way, dragged them-

selves along the dusty horse-road. This last stage of the journey, although the shortest, was the most painful of any. When once we had reached Huy, there was still another disappointment. The 28th had left the town at midnight. From the heights which dominate the left bank of the Meuse, could be seen enemy patrols. From one minute to another, strong enemy forces might appear. The men were terribly exhausted. In spite of the overwhelming heat, they had marched for sixteen hours at a time, during two days. The question was would they have strength enough to start again and to continue their march as far as Couthuin, where the 28th had gone? At the station there was neither an engine nor a waggon. After some parleying, however, the station-master of Huy-Statte succeeded in getting a train from Namèche and, at 12.30, the column set out by rail for Namur.

In spite of the extreme fatigue of these brave men, it would be impossible to give an idea of the joy depicted on all their faces. Nothing could prove the determination of each one of them to escape the enemy better than the result obtained by this supreme effort. Not one of those who left Awans on the night of the 14th had fallen out of the column. Every man of the little phalanx answered to the roll-call at Namur. At the College de la Paix, where they were all quartered, the doctors soon dressed their bleeding feet.

Thanks to their force of character, to their exceptional powers of endurance, and to their extraordinary courage, these heroes escaped a humiliating captivity. A few days later, they were to be seen once more on the battle-fields of Antwerp and of the Yser, fighting desperately with the enemy, and ready again to sacrifice their lives for their country.

CHAPTER VI

Chaufontaine

(August, 1914)

**BY COUNT GASTON DE RIBACOURT, SUB-LIEUTENANT OF THE
HEAVY HOWITZER CORPS**

As soon as the mobilisation was decreed, I went to the War Office to ask what services I could render as electrical engineer. I was advised to go, as quickly as possible, to the fortified position of Liège, as technical help was needed there for preparing the defence.

I arrived there the evening of August 3rd and, the following morning, was engaged for the Chaufontaine Fort. The next thing was to fit myself out. I went at once to the Citadel, which looked like a huge hive. Every different service was in full swing and the most perfect order and activity reigned. Ten minutes later, I was equipped as an artilleryman and, with my bag in my hand and my field-glasses strapped round my back, was on the way to the train which took me, after changing, to the foot of the hill which dominates the Fort.

It was a warm, bright August day and I climbed the steep hill at a rapid pace, without giving a thought to the beautiful landscape around me. An hour later, I had reached that little nest of defence which

we call a fort, and was glad to be able to offer all the energy, intelligence, and knowledge that I possessed for the service of my country, which was symbolised for me by the flag which floated at the summit of the hill.

Everything had already a warlike aspect. Here and there, trees had been felled in all their verdure. Barbed wire trellises had been stretched across the most accessible passes. Sentinels stationed here and there stopped me and, after questioning me and hearing why I was there, gave me a friendly salute. An orderly on guard took me to the officers in charge. I was at once received, installed in my new quarters and welcomed with enthusiasm and with that feverish energy which characterised the combatants of our heroic resistance.

I set to work at once, for I had much to learn. In the first place, there was the observation of the firing range, then the regulating of the cannons and all the electrical mechanism of the accessory services, the registering of the mine chambers, of the wire entanglements, etc. All this took up the rest of my morning and it was only later on that I could begin to think of the special functions which had been delegated to me.

Concealed among the hills which dominate the east of Liège, protected in a semi-circle by one of the windings of the River Vesdre, the Chaudfontaine Fort, of triangular form, was intended, together with the Fléron and Evegnée Forts, to cover the Herve plateau. From its position, it seemed as though it would be the object of the enemy's first efforts. Behind the Fort, emerging from the abrupt slope of the valley, could be seen, standing out against the sky, a corner of Liège, that corner which was so fami-

liar to all Belgians, thanks to the Exhibition of the 75th anniversary. In the foreground, a little to the right, about a mile and a half away, was Chévremont Abbey, and on the slopes were the villages of Romsée and Magnée, their red roofs, and their active, suburban life giving a gay touch to the landscape.

A telephone message suddenly broke the calm, by announcing the approach of the enemy. The village of Foret, situated on the east, became the object of all our attention, and very soon we saw the sombre procession of grey uniforms appearing on the scene.

The Commander of the Fort assembled his men on the parapets and, after a few rousing words, gave his little garrison the order to open fire. When the first cannon was fired, each man returned quickly to his post. As my service was the observation of the firing range, I hurried to the plain and, under cover of the surrounding woods, reached the spot which had been indicated to me. Thanks to my portable telephone, I could then direct the first shooting. At the second firing, the shells and shrapnels burst over the village and it was at once evident that the quick firing from the Fort and the batteries were producing excellent results. With my field-glasses, I could distinctly see the enemy stop short, hesitate, and finally retreat, as it was hopeless to fight with an invisible adversary.

This prompt defence probably preserved our Fort from the terrible assaults sustained, during the night, by the neighbouring ones. The simultaneous attack of all the forts of the Vesdre-Meuse sector was one of the most impressive sights I witnessed during the whole campaign. It began in the evening by an intense bombarding by the German light artillery,

answered heroically by the whole Liège defence. The incessant cannonading was dominated by the louder voice of the big fortress guns. The wan flashes from the cannon burst forth in thousands, while through the darkness the crude searchlights were projected, in an attempt to find the enemy's batteries. From time to time, during a moment's calm, could be heard the cries and moans of the German wounded, caught in the barbed wire and fired on by the machine-guns. All this gave a magnificent, and at the same time, frightful, aspect to the scene.

The following day, the morning was more calm, when suddenly we were informed that an infantry regiment, after creeping through the woods, had taken possession of the Forêt Château. Posted on the parapet, I directed open firing on the enemy there. The distance had been very exactly gauged, so that our prey was an easy one and our first shell fell right on the building.

Just as from an ant heap, suddenly destroyed by a kick, myriads of Boches rushed out, seeking refuge among the trees of the park and in a hollow road near by. Carefully directed, the projectiles followed them everywhere and reached them in their hiding-places, so that very soon the lawns were strewn with wounded or dead men. The enemy was once more obliged to disappear and nothing was now to be seen but convoys of ambulance cars, taking away those over whom Death had only hovered.

The resistance now became more and more difficult, as the enemy had managed to place batteries at points near enough to the Fort to reach it without being exposed. It was, therefore, necessary to discover fresh observation posts. I was designated for this

service and, accompanied by a corporal, I set out. For nearly an hour we advanced, burrowing and hiding, in order to discover the enemy's positions. It was my first experience with shrapnels rifling the ground in every direction, in order to prevent observation. The Germans fired in volleys of four and, every time we heard the projectiles arriving, we had to lie down and then get up directly after the explosion, in order to locate the batteries. I discovered them, at last, behind a hedge in one of the Romsée gardens. As soon as I had informed the Fort, a few shots were fired in order to find the exact spot and then the German batteries had such a deluge of fire that, in less than a quarter of an hour, the position was considered impossible by them and at once evacuated. But the iron circle was gradually closing round us. After two days of heroic effort, the 3rd Division had been obliged to retreat, leaving the forts to their fate. Threatened on all sides, it was indispensable for us to establish a high observatory which should supply us with necessary information, as this was absolutely lacking since the departure of our covering infantry.

A few miles to the left of the Fort, the spire of the Chèvremont church stood out proudly against the sky. The old abbey, a vestige of a former epoch, was to help in our powerful modern defence work. By order of the Commander of the Fort, I set out in the night, to establish, as invisibly as possible, a telephonic line which should connect the observatory with the Fort. Fastening the wire through the brambles which abound in this district, and placing it along the road, I was fortunate enough to see my efforts crowned with success. Getting the wire into the abbey was more

difficult. Fortunately I was able to make use of the poles which served for the electric light. I had to replace the wire of the lightning conductor, along a stake, by a telephonic wire and, following the other canalisations, bring it as far as the church. This took me a good part of the morning, but, by ten o'clock, after inventing a whole system of cords and ladders, I was finally established in the top of the spire. Thanks to a slate I had removed, I could see the country round to the east and north-east and, by means of the subterranean telephonic wires, I could communicate information concerning the slightest incident at Fléron and at Evegnée, and thus render valuable service to the defence.

For the next four or five days, I lived inside this spire, with a sub-officer. Twice only, a Belgian patrol paid us a visit. The rest of the time, only Germans prowled round. Many were the alerts which surprised us. A dozen men, belonging to the German infantry, spent half a day inspecting the abbey to see if there were really no Belgian soldier hidden there. Another day, just as we were looking through our window, we caught sight of a German patrol looking up. That was an alarming moment. We wondered what to do. If we moved away, it would make a change in the appearance of the window. By staying, we risked betraying ourselves and should probably be killed. This torture lasted half an hour. At a certain moment, I saw six men of the patrol take aim at the window. Fortunately, the sub-officer evidently thought better of it and did not give the command to fire. Remaining motionless had saved our lives. Two men who had inspected the tower had reported to their chief that there was

nothing suspicious, and the seven Boches went away slowly, singing as they went.

August 11th was fatal to us. In the morning, towards six o'clock, although I had taken the precaution to hide in a closed chapel, I was noticed by a man in the neighbourhood. Two hours later, when I was at my post of observation, I saw that the abbey, and particularly the church, was the aim of the enemy. After three or four trial shots, a shell reached the roof of the church and then the volleys were repeated quickly. I was just endeavouring to locate an enemy battery which was bombarding Fléron from Beau-Tilly. Whilst I was giving indications about this, I was obliged to climb up into the steeple, which was the only place of escape from the firing. Batteries concealed behind the Chenée station were destroying the abbey. What terrible moments I spent up there! I was alone in the steeple, as my companion had gone to take his meal and could not get back to me. I stayed there as long as I could give any useful information. For two long hours the projectiles rained on the abbey. Presently, the steeple itself was hit. A shell burst in the wood-work over my head, took off my forage cap, and smashed the telephone in front of me. I was almost buried under the heaps of slate and wood and was half stunned by the violence of the blow. I thought my last hour had come. It was only at that moment that I thought of my tragic position and, on turning round, I saw that the roof of the choir was on fire. It was quite time to get away. As I descended the ladder, I discovered that I was slightly wounded in the knee. It was only a big surface wound though." I pulled myself together, rushed quickly down and,

amidst all the *débris* that was falling on every side, made my way to the cellars, which the Fathers, the last few days, had been transforming into a shelter. An impressive scene awaited me there. In the middle of the subterranean vault, two Fathers and my companion were kneeling in prayer round the Holy Sacrament, which they had taken from the church at the beginning of the bombardment. Their joy was great on seeing me appear, for they thought I must have been dead some time.

For the next hour, we remained there, praying God to protect us. In the meantime, a great part of the abbey fell in. Nothing remained of the church but ruins. The valuable library was now only a heap of cinders, and was still burning.

Believing that they had attained their end, the German batteries now ceased firing. We were obliged to spend the rest of the day, though, amidst these ruins, which presented a sinister appearance, and wait until the darkness to go back to the Fort. In the night, feeling that at any rate we had done our duty, the sub-officer and I started on our way, stealing along for two miles, through country occupied by the enemy. It seemed a long, long way, beset as it was with danger. Several times we had to crouch down and hide until German patrols had passed by, only a few yards away from us. Finally, we caught sight of the outline of a Belgian sentinel and, a few minutes later, were back in the Fort, where the story of our adventures was enjoyed by all and we were congratulated by the officers.

August 12th was a wretched day for us, as there was no more observation possible. The big cannons had begun firing and our last moment was

approaching. The hours seem interminable when the firing is only haphazard from the remaining cannons, and when one fires with the idea of using up the ammunition, quite as much as for the sake of endeavouring to injure the enemy.

Chaudfontaine was in a deplorable state. We could have no light at night, as a shell had fallen, without bursting, into the chimney of the steam engine. The Commander was determined to defend his Fort up to the very last and had posted men on the slopes to fight with the bayonet and endeavour to repulse the attack which was expected in the night.

With our hearts full of fury, we were all determined to give our lives for our King and our Country, and our fellow-feeling caused the soul of each man to rise to the same level. Whilst the others were keeping watch, with the help of a few men I endeavoured to get the accursed shell out of our machinery. It was nearly three in the morning when we succeeded in our task. Everything was quickly put in order, and it was with a hearty outburst of our national anthem that our brave men greeted the light which poured from the electric projectors twenty minutes later. This seemed like life renewed, and with it came renewed hope. Another day had commenced and the Fort was not taken. That morning, alas, all hope was crushed, for, as soon as it was daylight, huge projectiles came at regular intervals and we could not reply to them, as they came from too great a distance. Towards nine o'clock, when I was in the officers' shooting gallery, a shock, accompanied by a terrific report, shook the whole interior of the Fort. An immense "38" had just burst in the powder-room and the Fort was blown up. I was thrown against

the opposite wall, and dragged myself to the door through the *débris*. With another officer, I crossed the hall, which had been transformed into a barracks, and there a fearful sight met my eyes. At the moment of the explosion, a hundred and forty men of the garrison had been lying there on straw or on mattresses, and now, in tragic horror, I saw the whole of this place on fire. Straw, mattresses, and soldiers, all were burning together! In the midst of this brasier, wretched men were struggling, with their clothes all in flames, like veritable living torches. We could scarcely drag one of them from the furnace. It was a horrible death, worthy of the martyrs of old. From the midst of the fire, dominating the groans, moans, and shrieks of suffering, some voices could be heard uttering the supreme cry of "Hurrah for the King!" "Hurrah for our Country!"

CHAPTER VII

Loncin Fort

FROM ACCOUNTS BY THE ARMY DOCTORS: MALOENS, OF THE 3RD BATTERY OF HEAVY HOWITZERS; COURTIN, OF THE 1ST CHASSEURS; ROSKAM, OF THE 14TH LINE REGIMENT; DEFALLE, DIRECTOR OF THE CALAIS MUNICIPAL CRÈCHE AMBULANCE; AND QUARTERMASTER KRANTZ, OF THE GENDARMERIE

ON the morning of August 6, 1914, Lieutenant-General Leman suddenly arrived at the Loncin Fort.

"An attempt has just been made to assassinate me," he said to Captain Naessens, Commander of the Fort, "I have come to take refuge behind your cannons."

The Captain immediately asked him for orders.

"I have no orders to give you here," replied the General. "You give your own orders in the Fort. My business is to attend to the defence of the fortified position."

The Commander of the Fort immediately called his men together and addressed them in French and in Flemish:

"General Leman has done us the great honour of taking refuge with us, my boys," he said. "Shall we give up the General?"

There were cries of "No! No!" on all sides.

"Well, then, if we have decided not to give up the General, we shall perish here. For, either the Fort will be blown up and I shall be blown up with you, or the Germans will come up here to attack us and, when they have passed the accessory defences, walking over the dead bodies of their own men, we shall form a last square. I shall keep seven bullets in my Browning, six for my enemies and the last for myself and we will all go together to Paradise."

Commander Naessens, a short, thick-set man, with a very determined face, and steel-blue, piercing eyes, was adored by his men, and this speech was greeted with indescribable enthusiasm.

"You must all swear that you will never yield," he cried, in the midst of the tumult. Thereupon, one by one, the soldiers filed up to their Commander and took this solemn oath.

From that moment, Naessens had his men thoroughly in hand. They would stand by him to the very death and his greatest pride was to be able to reply to the General's question: "Are you sure of your men?" with the words: "As sure as I am of myself, General!"

It was quite true, too. They were absolutely ready for anything. If volunteers were wanted for a dangerous expedition, double the number needed volunteered to go and they all beseeched the Commander to let them be the ones chosen. Those who were not accepted went away greatly disappointed.

Three or four of those brave fellows had formed themselves into a band which was known as "the

Bonnot Band." Armed with guns or carbines, these explorers set off, each day, in a motor-car and acted either as a *liaison* between Loncin and the Forts which were still holding out, or as a patrol for getting information for the Commander, with reference to the presence of the enemy. Their daring was amazing. On one occasion the Commander's horse, whilst grazing in a neighbouring enclosure, had been killed. This "Band" promised to provide him with another mount. A few hours later, they returned with the horses of two German officers, laden with helmets and lances.

After the combats round Liège, soldiers of the 1st and 4th Unmounted Chasseurs and of the 9th and 14th Line Regiments, men who had lost their units, came to take refuge in the Loncin Fort, but, the following day, the Commander sent an officer with them to Waremme, only keeping for himself his own garrison of about five hundred men. This number was really sufficient and, during the terrible days from August 6th to 15th, the calmness and indifference to danger of these men were admirable.

During a violent bombardment, General Leman, on coming into the central building with Commander Naessens, saw a little scene which moved him to tears. The men, scattered about in little groups, were playing cards or talking together quite tranquilly, whilst, in one corner, indifferent to the noise, a soldier was playing some Liège *cramignons* on a flute, and his comrades, standing round him, were singing the refrains in chorus.

The following notes are taken from the diary of Quartermaster Krantz of the Gendarmerie, who had been appointed bodyguard to General Leman. After the explosion of the Loncin Fort, Krantz, with eight serious wounds, was taken to the St. Servais College of Liège.

August 7th. The fortress Infantry, sent out to reconnoitre, called our attention to a patrol of Uhlans on their way from Ans to Loncin. It was at once dispersed by one of our sub-officers, at the head of his section. We learnt from some courageous men that the German Field Artillery had taken position near the Ans aviation base.

August 8th. During the morning, German patrols, which had reached Awans, were driven back by our shrapnels and our Infantry. At three o'clock, the Fort opened fire with its twelve-centimetre guns over the Ans aviation base, where our reconnaissances had signalled enemy batteries and a movement of troops.

August 9th. I have been to Liège, where I heard that the Germans were bringing heavy artillery in order to attack the Forts. I told the General, and he ordered me to watch the movements and the passage of this artillery. He also gave me the mission of examining whether the Nasproué tunnel near Dolhain were practicable. I discovered that the line, which we had destroyed, had been repaired by the Germans, as they had no other way for their "420" cannons. During the afternoon, the Fort fired on various enemy batteries. We observed that a *Taube* had come down on the Ans aviation base and we fired on it violently with shrapnels. We also took a patrol of Uhlans prisoners on the Tongres road.

In the night, we bombarded a mass of troops quartered in the direction of Awans.

August 10th. The enemy bombarded with about thirty shells of light calibre, which caused no further damage than to chip one of our chimneys. The Fort replied on the enemy's batteries near Ans. I was sent to discover the movements of the troops and returned with important information. Among other things I had been informed of the installation of a post of observation by the Germans, in the steeple of the church on the Ans plateau. We fired on this steeple and brought down the tower, thus rendering it impossible for observation purposes.

August 11th. Calm. Reconnaissances in all directions by motor-car.

August 12th. Morning, terrific and rapid bombarding by the Germans. We replied each time with great energy and with very exact aim. Unfortunately, the cupola of one of our twelve-centimetres was soon injured, but, during a lull, we managed to repair it.

The entrance to the Fort was also hit. We captured four more Uhlans. During the night, reciprocal bombarding.

August 13th. We noted that the heavy German Artillery had commenced action. A violent firing from guns of 150 millimetres injured two of our cupolas.

August 14th. At three in the morning, we were bombarded by Howitzers of 280 and 305mm. The Fort shook to its foundations, an iron whirlwind broke loose in perfect avalanches over the exterior surface, and the gusts continued, every other two minutes, for some hours. After each shock, fragments of cracked and powdered cement fell on our heads.

A grey dust, mingled with thousands of glass splinters from the window-panes, crackled under our feet, parching and irritating our throats and nostrils. The Fort was gradually crumbling. A 305 shell entered the Infirmary, killing and wounding several soldiers. At eleven o'clock, the clothing stores met with the same fate and, one after another, various buildings were destroyed, also the electric material, the ventilators, and the draw-bridge at the entrance of the Fort.

At about three or four in the afternoon, a truce-bearer asked to be allowed to speak to the Commander and demanded the surrender of the Fort.

"We prefer dying to surrendering," answered Captain Naessens. It was a proud answer and it expressed the general feeling. Towards evening, the firing slackened and everyone could rest. During the night, a Staff officer slipped out, taking away with him the various valuable papers belonging to the position.

August 15th. What a terrible day! From five in the morning, the bombarding has been continual, coming in gusts. Four crashes, one after another, and then a whizzing, a fall, and explosions in the cement. The shells penetrated to a depth of half a yard, digging out holes of four yards square. Towards eight o'clock the soldiers' rooms were wrecked, their beds overturned, and windows, fastened with iron bars eighteen centimetres thick, were broken; the Infirmary, the operating room, the kitchen, refectory, and the General's room were swept away. Everything was destroyed, not a single place remained which could serve as a shelter. The Fort is now in ruins from top to bottom, and we are in

complete darkness and scarcely able to breathe, on account of the poisonous and noxious gases, as not a single ventilator works. Only two cupolas remain with which we can reply to the enemy's terrible avalanche. We are not continuing, though, as we do not know where the enemy's batteries are and they are certainly beyond our reach. During a lull, this morning, another truce-bearer paid us a visit. He was not escorted and carried a white flag. The sentinel ordered him to halt and to return, so that he should not be able to communicate any information with regard to the result of the adverse firing. On the Boche's refusal to obey, the sentinel ordered him a second time to halt and, as the second time he refused to obey, he was shot down. He had time to signal with his white flag before falling to the ground dead. We believe, and it is also the opinion of our officers, that this supposed truce-bearer came treacherously to take his bearings for the firing of the four hundred and twenty guns, and that he sacrificed his life for the sake of giving the exact spot to the Artillery. Immediately after his death, we had to endure a very exact and continued bombardment. It was on this day, August 15th, that the Germans employed their famous "420" Howitzers.

From time to time, we saw the General and the officers walking about in the open on the fortification glaxis, observing the enemy, with the most admirable *sang-froid* and an utter disregard for danger. The most miraculous and incomprehensible thing was that not one of them was injured by the explosions on every side of them.

At 5.20 in the afternoon, General Leman, Captain Naessens, Lieutenant Modard, their two Sub-Lieu-

tenants, several other sub-officers and I were in the shooting gallery, and, although the Fort was practically destroyed, our brave, valorous chiefs continued giving orders. The others were sitting down in the central passage awaiting events. Suddenly we heard the protracted whizzing sound of a big projectile. "Here's another!" said one of the men in the passage. A huge burst of flame and then a formidable shock which flung us all against the wall and then—nothing but silence!

Quartermaster Krantz's diary stopped here. He had fainted and did not come to himself until he was in the hospital.

Dr. Courtin, who had the good luck to come out of the explosion uninjured, soon regained his presence of mind.

"I found myself lying on the ground," he said, "after a faint. It was very difficult to breathe, but fortunately a little air from a broken window reached me. I managed to get up and found that Dr. Maloens was lying at my side. His face was bleeding and I gave him a few drops of brandy. Nearly all the men had instinctively protected their eyes. All of them remembered their oath and refused to surrender. A remarkable example of heroism was given us by a young soldier who was at the end of a passage. He was black with powder, his clothes were in rags and he had two holes covered with blood in place of pupils to his eyes. He continued shooting, nevertheless, until he had used his last cartridge. On approaching him, we discovered that one of his feet was wedged between two blocks of stone and it had to be amputated so that he could be released.

"In the meantime, a few men who had escaped injuries managed to get out through the window, by taking down the bars. As I knew the passage, I moved slowly forwards in the darkness and found all the windows blocked. Suddenly, I saw a ray of light filtering through some pieces of cement which had fallen. By widening the aperture, I managed to get out. All round the Fort, our poor men were hurrying along in flames, half wild with pain. Others, on their knees, were reciting prayers. It was a frightful sight!"

In the evening, a German Colonel went to the Liège Military Hospital to say that a terrible explosion had destroyed the Loncin Fort. Two or three doctors, one of whom was Dr. Defalle, started immediately to this Fort. "We met some of the wounded," he told me, "coming along the Thier d'Ans road and, as we went along, we kept meeting motor-cars and pedestrians. In the villages, nearly all the inhabitants were at their doors, anxiously looking out. At Ans plateau, where the church steeple had been razed to the ground, we met a cart in which General Leman was lying. The cart was drawn by two horses and the General was accompanied by Staff Deputy Commander Collart and by a German officer. The General, who had just been taken from the ruins through a hole in the escarpment, was still half suffocated, and his face was blue. He had no wound visible though, and he was perfectly conscious.¹ On reaching the Fort, I found it was surrounded by numerous enemy troops of different arms and parti-

¹ This was confirmed by a letter from Captain Commander Hauteclerc to Mlle. Leman, the General's daughter.

cularly by the Engineers. Some of the soldiers were waving a large Red Cross flag, in order to stop the firing from the Hollogne Fort. The explosion had chiefly affected the south-east part and the moats there were filled with the *débris*. The central masonry was destroyed and encumbered with blocks of cement. The cupola was knocked down. There was very little smoke, but, from time to time, detonations, caused by the cartridge stores exploding from the heat.

"From these ruins, could be heard the most unearthly groans and cries. The poor, suffering men, who were burning there, were begging us to help them. Blocks of stone or cement had to be raised and sometimes we were obliged to saw off a limb, in order to release these brave men. They were partly carbonised, quite black, and almost naked, when we succeeded in transporting them to a meadow near. From there they were taken to the town. In the counterscarp, separated by the moat, were some flanking coffer. The occupants of these had not been able to get back to the central construction, as the subterranean passage was obstructed. After some hours of labour, we were able to push in the ventilation gratings and to get the half suffocated men out.

"The Loncin inhabitants, overwhelmed with anguish, watched our terrible work. The recruiting had been local and they all dreaded lest they should recognise a member of their own family in these poor tumefied, charred bodies, with burnt hair, which were dragged from under the *débris*. They helped the doctors in bandaging and in administering the morphia for attenuating the traumatic shock. They gave the

patients soothing drinks and installed them in their houses. Nearly every house had its wounded men, who were sent as soon as possible to Liège, either to the Military Hospital, the ambulances of the Daughters of the Cross and of the Jesuits, or to the one in the Rue des Rivageois.

"The Germans seemed surprised at the immensity of the catastrophe. Their officers, particularly those belonging to the Engineers, endeavoured to ease the suffering of the victims. When a few shots were fired, though, from the Waroux wood, they changed their attitude, blamed the Belgians, and talked of reprisals. We doctors reminded them that *our* lives were as much in danger as theirs, and that that fact did not prevent us from doing our duty. The Boches were somewhat confused and were quiet after this. Towards ten o'clock at night all the wounded were removed."

"I was at the St. Laurent Hospital," said Dr. Roskam, "when the wounded were brought in, towards nine in the evening. The sight of these poor men, with frizzled hair, black hands and faces, and scorched clothes, was frightful. The Germans took them for Senegalese. In the operating-room, scenes took place which filled us with horror. On taking off their clothes, shreds of flesh were torn off, legs and arms separated from the body, and horrible wounds and burns of all sorts appeared. There was a frightful odour of carbonised flesh. What made this scene more poignant still, was the courage, the stoicism of all these men *who did not complain*.

"They had scarcely come to themselves again after their dizziness, from which they were roused by the

suffering caused by the washing of their wounds with green soap, when they asked after their Commander and their Lieutenant. Many of them had tears in their eyes when they heard that their chiefs were saved and they asked to be carried into the ward where Naessens and Modard were lying, seriously wounded. The two officers could scarcely recognise their men, thanks to powder, bandages, scars, and swollen features. They encouraged and congratulated them nevertheless, and in all justice. The whole of the time these men were in hospital, they were admirable. Horribly burnt, some of them blind, some with the sight of one eye gone, in many cases the drum of the ear perforated and the patient suffering from otitis, they endured everything with resignation, never complaining, grumbling, or protesting in any way. They were veritable heroes. When the first to recover started for Germany, Naessens and Modard, who had never intended to leave their soldiers and who were obliged to stay longer in Liège, in order to finish their cure, were carried to the court-yard by the men-nurses, in order to say a last farewell to the brave men who adored them!"

CHAPTER VIII

Haelen

(August 12, 1914)

**BY COLONEL BALTIA, CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE 1ST CAVALRY
DIVISION**

After defending Liège, the 3rd Division rejoined the Belgian Army, which had taken up its position on the Gette. The 1st, 3rd, and 5th Divisions were placed in the first line; the 2nd and 6th in the second line, whilst the 4th defended Namur. These forces were covered by the Cavalry Division which was first placed at Waremmé. It fell back on St. Trond and then on the left of the army, thus lengthening the line from Tirlemont to near Diest.

On the 12th of August, the enemy Cavalry endeavoured to force the passage of the Gette at Haelen. Against six regiments of the 2nd and 4th Divisions of German Cavalry, supported by the 7th and 9th Battalions of Chasseurs and by three batteries, that is 4000 horsemen, 2000 foot-soldiers, and 18 cannons, the Belgian Cavalry opposed victoriously 2400 horsemen, 410 Cyclists and 12 cannons.

(See Army Commandment Report.)

For several days, detachments of the enemy Cavalry had made daring attempts at all the points of our line of defence along the Gette, but had found it well guarded everywhere.

On August 12th, our intrepid reconnaissances, consisting of officers of the Guides and Lancers, in-

formed us that the enemy had been reinforced everywhere, and we had the distinct impression that an effort to pierce our line would be made at Haelen. We were on our guard and if the Division of German Cavalry hoped to pass there, it would meet the principal mass of the Cavalry Division of the Belgian Army. The enemy imagined that we were scattered all along the river, as we had been the preceding days, from Diest to Drieslinter, but it did not know that, by a skilful manoeuvre, Lieutenant General de Witte, only leaving the minimum of our forces at the secondary points of the passage of the river, had constituted an important reserve, which was in readiness to receive the enemy.

Whilst this mass was forming, General de Witte gave into the hands of the Colonel of the 5th Lancers the standard which this newly-formed regiment had just received. On that very day, this valiant troop won the honour of having "Haelen" inscribed on the immaculate silk of that standard.

The Battle Ground

The sun, which on rising had appeared sulky, now burst forth in all its splendour, lighting up the farms and the white farm-houses scattered along the road which unites Loxbergen and Haelen and winds between fertile fields, which were still partially covered with their rich harvests of corn and oats. The Division had made its headquarters on the border of Loxbergen, from which spot there is an extensive view. To the left is a narrow valley encircled with poplars and willows. Here and there are to be seen the red roofs of houses. On the brow of the hill

dominating the valley, a Belgian battery was installed. The bells of the Church steeples of Diest rang out clearly and solemnly. In the distance could be seen the outline of the little, low-built church of Haelen. This little straggling town, almost unknown hitherto, was destined to be the witness of the violent, brutal effort of the German Cavalry to dislodge the Belgian Cavalry and open a way for itself into the heart of the country, after reaching the flank of the Belgian Army covered by the Cavalry Division. The Germans counted on having their revenge this time for all the successes that the Belgian Division had won during the first eight days of the campaign. They expected to avenge themselves on the Belgians, who had swept away their reconnaissances, their patrols, their posts of *liaison* and their centres of information and entirely disorganised their clever but fragile look-out system.

The First Firing

Presently, the lights of an incendiary fire were to be seen. It was the signal given by the German reconnaissances to let their army know that we had baffled their plans.

Our brave Cyclist-Carabineers were already at work, valiantly defending the position they occupied. With the help of the Cyclist Pioneer Pontonniers, they had made excavations, deepened the ditches, arranged hedges and fences, barricaded the roads and paths, installed their machine-guns in favourable positions, and were now determined to inflict a severe punishment on the invaders.

As soon as the first squadrons of Dragoons and Hussars appeared, the firing broke loose. The enemy

hesitated a moment and then, urged on by their chiefs, took fresh courage and fired on our little Cyclists with their rifles, machine-guns, and cannons. The cowardly cads who led, or rather pushed them on, had protected themselves by placing unoffensive inhabitants of the villages whom they had hunted up, in front of them.

Our riflemen, well hidden, took aim calmly, and at every shot, a pointed helmet, a *colbak* or a *schapska* rolled on the ground and a man, dressed in grey uniform, fell among the harvest. Our "diables noirs" fell back, step by step, defending every furrow of ground and every bush.

German Cavalry Charges

Suddenly, the avalanche of German squadrons appeared and, in a wild gallop, rushed on the foot-soldiers, who sustained the shock without flinching, replying with their guns and bayonets.

The squadrons, excited by their gallop, continued their way until they came to the Belgian Lancers, who had alighted behind the Cyclists and who now received the charge with a running fire at short distance.

The gallop of these yelling, clanging masses shook the very ground, and the long, piercing lances looked as though they must overturn everything in their way, but at the first discharge of our Lancers' carbines, aided effectually by the four machine-guns manipulated calmly by Lieutenant Scouvemont and Lieutenant Ouverleaux, and by the firing of three squadrons of the 1st Guides, stationed to the right of the battlefield, the mass whirled round and was scattered. The first squadrons were followed by others. The second

charge was received in the same way as the first one, and the third one like the second. Seven charges one after the other were broken up.

The moment was a tragic one. A quantity of horses was tearing wildly about, mad with terror and pain, and red with blood. Some of them came rushing against the horses of our Lancers. The panic spread among these, and, in a moment, an immense troop of horses was tearing about the plains amidst the firing of guns and the dry bursting of the shrapnels. Our soldiers, unmoved, reloaded their guns and prepared to repulse any further attacks, scarcely stopping to give a pitying glance at the dead bodies of friends and enemies around them, or at the wounded, who were groaning in pain.

Fresh Attacks of the Enemy

Those in command of the German Cavalry, recognising the inefficacy of their charges, sent no more horses, but their horsemen on foot, with carbines, supported by their machine-guns.

These men advanced over the plain, creeping in amongst the corn, crouching down in every shelter offered by the ground, and hiding behind the sheaves to escape the terrible fire of our courageous and skilful men.

Six regiments of Dragoons, Hussars, and Cuirassiers were already engaged and were advancing with great difficulty, when the help of two Battalions of Chasseurs was sent to them.

Our Artillery then entered into action. The first Horse battery, manipulated by an energetic officer quite sure of himself, sent his shells and shrapnels

with straight aim on to the Cavalry and foot-soldiers covering the plain and, at the same time, covered with his destructive shells the Haelen bridge and the village, in which the fresh Cavalry regiments were massed together which had come to reinforce and support their comrades. Under the pressure of superior numbers, our Cavalry had hard work to hold out, but it did not budge an inch whilst giving our Infantry time to arrive.

Arrival of our First Reinforcements

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when our first help appeared: three Battalions of the 4th Regiment and two of the 24th, accompanied by a group of Artillery. These troops had started from Hauthem-St. Marguerite at 10.30. Part of the Infantry was sent to Velpen, to reach Haelen from there, and the other part was sent, as a reinforcement to the defenders of the Yserbeck Farm.

The Artillery supported these two attacks, but unfortunately, of the two batteries which took position at the Loxbergen Mill, only one could open fire without being immediately counter-attacked by the German Artillery, which was in position to the north of Velpen.

Whilst the Infantry was on its way to Velpen and Yserbeck Farm, the 1st Cavalry Brigade took to horse and went in the direction of the left wing of the battle-field.

The 2nd Brigade, which had been in action for seven long hours, now went in search of its horses.

At 7 o'clock, Yserbeck Farm, or rather the smoking ruins of this farm, were retaken by the Leconte

Battalion, and Velpen was reconquered by the Rade-maekers Battalion.

All around us were horses with broken limbs, blood streaming from their nostrils and wounded sides. Some of them were dying in the ditches by the roadside, or in the fields. Others were galloping wildly about, their saddles swinging between their legs.

Then began the pitiful procession of the wounded, who, with haggard faces, were dragging themselves with difficulty towards the rear. Some of them went along, bent nearly double, walking in the ditches. Others were supported by the ambulance men, or by priests of the ambulance contingent. Some, too, were carried on stretchers, or even in their coats held at the four corners.

Standing up, in the middle of the road, disdainful of the destructive shells which struck horses quite near them, or of the shrapnels which hit the horses they were leading, or of the bullets which whizzed through the branches, General de Witte and his Staff watched the various phases of the struggle, giving to the troops a fine example of fearlessness in the midst of danger. *Débris* of all kinds strewed the ground, ammunition waggons came galloping along the road, bringing fresh supplies, whilst along the whole front, fires lighted by the shells sent up their sinister light and bitter smoke towards the clear sky above.

Victory!

The battle seemed still undecided when the sun was sinking in the horizon, but just then, our artillery men noticed a retreating movement of the enemy's line, which, driven by our Infantry, was beginning to

fall back towards the bridge and village of Haelen. Our men immediately opened fire, with all their cannons, in the direction of the passage along which the fugitives were pouring. The latter, in spite of the efforts and threats of their officers, drew away with them the Cavalry regiments that had just come to their rescue. The retreat, as night came on, degenerated into a wild helter-skelter, which went on as far as Hasselt and Herck-St. Lambert, where the defeated troops fortified themselves hastily, in order to be able to oppose an eventual pursuit.

The dismal croaking of the crows could now be heard in the night which was already almost dark. The galloping of the frightened horses, spurred on cruelly by their riders, hammered on the pavement. Under the ceaseless rain of projectiles from the Belgian guns, the ten German regiments, magnificent as they had been in the morning, formed now only a disorderly mob trampling on the foot-soldiers, the dead, and the wounded, and abandoning their officers and even their Generals. At the other extremity of the battle-field, could be heard the songs of victory of the Belgian troops, triumphing in their first feat of arms.

The Night after the Combat

Gradually, the battle-field became silent, a veil of darkness, of mourning, and of terror covered this ground, where so many young men, who only the day before were so happy to live, were now sleeping their last sleep, or moaning in pain, abandoned to their fate.

The silence of night, which followed the hell-like noise of the day before, seemed more profound than ever. The stars, which were already twinkling, and

the moon, shining in all its brilliancy, were a startling contrast to the horrors before our eyes. Our thoughts became clearer as we walked slowly along in the direction of our quarters. The tension of our nerves was at last relaxed. Many of us had not found our horses again. They had disappeared, and some of them had been killed in the tumult. This walk in the darkness of night gradually soothed our minds, and the memories of all that had happened became clearer.

Heroes. Courageous Deeds of our Soldiers and Officers

We thought of that cyclist, brave Royer, belonging to the Cavalry Division of the Staff. He had gone out resolutely, in the very midst of the fight, to bring in an officer, Lieutenant Waepenaere, who had been wounded in the thigh when he was leading out some timid foot-soldiers to the fray, young men who had not been under fire before. This brave soldier went back a second time into the furnace to get a machine-gun that had been abandoned and that he had to bring back on a cart. He then returned a third time to shoot two German cavalry men with his revolver. He had seen them hiding behind the sheaves and they had fired on him when he was bringing back his Lieutenant, and again when he was returning with the machine-gun. He brought their two helmets with him on his last expedition.

This intrepid young man was from Liège and he performed these three courageous acts in the most natural manner possible, convinced that he had merely done his duty as a soldier. He was very much surprised when he was appointed Corporal for his fine conduct. Later on, he was always ready, day or night,

for the most dangerous expeditions. His career ended gloriously, for he was killed in an army motor-car expedition, during the Pellenberg fight.

We thought, too, of that young soldier who had been horribly wounded and whose arm was all slashed. With his valid arm, he held out a piece of his gun to his General, crying out: "I still have my gun!" Then, too, there was that other one who had to be helped along by two of the ambulance men, but who insisted on carrying his trophy, which was a German lance.

We thought, too, of those other courageous ones: Thierry and Prince Baudouin de Ligne. They had both enlisted as motor-car volunteers for as long as the war should last. They obtained permission to go to the firing lines with the foot-soldiers, whom they stimulated by their example. They had made a trench, six of them together, had occupied it and, for an hour, had held out against superior forces, whilst endeavouring to take a machine-gun.

Our thoughts went out to many, many heroes, whose brave deeds we cannot relate here. Among them were Major Bourgouis and Major Stacquet; Commanders Demaret, Vandamme, and Wacquez; Captains Lequeux, Panquin, Van Vlierberghen; Lieutenant Stoops and Sub-Lieutenant Marrée, who were killed, and Major Rademaekers, Commander Dujardin, Lieutenants Mortier, M. Van Damme, A. Desmet, Ch. Albert and Chevalier de Waepenaere, all of whom were wounded.

Our Belgian race and our corps of officers gave proof, during that first shock, from the first moment of their baptism of fire, of all the bravery of their cool energy and of their unflinching tenacity.

After the Victory

It was broad daylight, the following morning, when we moved onwards towards Haelen. There was intense activity at Loxbergen; motor-cars and ambulances were taking their loads of wounded men to the Infirmary that had been installed in the school. They were laid there, side by side, on straw that was soon stained with blood. The atmosphere was impregnated with the odour of disinfectants. Sisters of Mercy, priests, doctors, and ambulance men lavished every care on them, seeking to alleviate their sufferings, to console them, to bring a gleam to their dim eyes by the mention of their absent families, of their homes, of their wives and children.

The most hardened heart would have given way at the sight of those poor naked bodies, writhing with pain, of those mutilated limbs, of those twisted arms, and of those beseeching looks, there, in the midst of all the rags and bandages, uniforms, boots, and weapons flung in a heap in the corner, or on the school desks, where only a few days before, happy Belgian children were learning to read and to love their country.

The Battle-Field

On leaving that den of pain and suffering, we felt a sort of relief in the open air, but this was not of long duration, as the sight of the battle-field filled us once more with anguish.

In front of the church of this little village, and already covered with dust, dead horses were lying, overturned carriages, trampled straw, remains of food, and of fires, and all the vile chaos that an army leaves behind it.

On the outskirts of the village, on the Haelen road we saw the first dead bodies of Germans, with their faces tumefied and their limbs rigid. They were lying in the most extraordinary positions. A Cuirassier was still holding on to a charger supplied with ammunition; farther on a Dragoon was lying face downwards, his leg bent backwards.

Presently we reached the little farm which had been fought for all the day. The house was torn asunder by shells and the barn reduced to ashes. The pigs were loose and wandering round the ruin.

As we advanced towards Haelen, the number of corpses increased. At the spot where the encounter between the riflemen had taken place, an almost continuous line of German and Belgian corpses showed what desperate fighting there had been. An officer of our 24th Line Regiment and a Dragoon officer were lying there, side by side. Which of the two had lived to see the other die? What drama was hidden under the contact of these two bodies?

At Haelen, the drama was poignant. In most of the houses there were gaping holes and the walls were all knocked about.

The street was covered with *débris* of all kinds. Hundreds of horses were lying with their heads crushed, their bodies open, or their backs broken. A nauseous odour almost choked us.

The courageous inhabitants had already buried the dead in huge graves, which they had dug near the village, and they were now beginning to take away the dead bodies of the horses.

At the corner of the street, a waggon with its cannon had been abandoned, as the wheels were broken. A little further on was another waggon, containing

ammunition, which would have to be drowned in the little river. In a wide ditch, was the dead body of a horse almost covering the body of an officer of the Dragoons, whose head alone was visible, emerging from the stagnant water.

On the Square, we picked up the Belgian flag, which had been floating at the Municipal Building. It had been snatched down by the Prussians, torn and dragged through the mud. We had it put up again, just as it was, and we saluted it with deep respect, little thinking then that it would soon be the emblem of our poor country, torn, violated, and trampled under foot by a barbarous soldiery.

On our return, we took the tragic path where our indomitable Cyclists had held out so heroically. The broken bicycles, the dead bodies of our "diables noirs" and of their adversaries, proved their courage, and the punishment they had inflicted on these Germans, particularly on those of the 17th Dragoons, that famous regiment, composed of the flower of the Mecklenburg nobility.

A little farther on, we met some soldiers carrying a ladder, on which a sub-officer of our Lancers was lying. He had been wounded in the knee. "I have spent a terrible night," he said, with a smile on his lips. "I was wounded and lying in a beet-root field by the side of a German sub-officer. After insulting me, he fired on me three times with his revolver, and lodged his last ball in his own head. He is still there in the field."

How long this walk back seemed to us! We would willingly have closed our eyes. We could not help thinking of the mothers, sisters, and families of all those we had just seen there, men who had died for

their country, victims of a sanguinary, brutal, perjured despot. The thought of these poor families threw a sombre veil over our pride in the memory of our first victory!

CHAPTER IX

The Budingen Combat

(August 18, 1914)

**DEATH OF LIEUTENANT COUNT W. D'URSEL. BY COLONEL DE
SCHIETRE DE LOPHEM, COMMANDER OF THE
4TH LANCERS**

The Combat of Budingen is an episode of the forcing of the Gette by the vanguards of General von Kluck's army. The attack extended from Diest to Tirlemont and was particularly violent at Tirlemont and at Hauthem-St. Marguerite.

ON the 17th of August, towards 6.30, in the evening, I received orders to go to Budingen, with the Staff of the 2nd Group of the 1st Guides. Early in the morning, the two Squadrons under my command had been sent from Geet-Betz on reconnaissance: the 3rd, towards Looz and the 4th, in the direction of Oreye. It was, therefore, without troops that I arrived at Budingen towards 7.30 P.M.

I took up my quarters at the Dubois farm where there was already a relief post. The passage of the Gette, the bridge of which had been destroyed, was defended by a Company of the 4th Line Regiment, installed in good trenches. The Commander, Lieutenant Dothée, informed me, though, that he had instructions to go on to Cumplich during the night. As I

could not remain alone in a locality so accessible to the enemy, I begged him to stay until other troops came to replace him, and I informed my Colonel of the situation. During the evening, Captain Commander de Favereau was sent to my support. He was at the head of the 1st Squadron of the 2nd Guides. They bivouacked in a field near my farm, and after having his horses attended to and his men fed, the Captain was ready at 2.30 to relieve the Company of the 4th Line Regiment.

Lieutenant Formanoir occupied the bridge and the left bank of the Gette; Lieutenant Comte d'Ursel the trenches to the south, keeping watch, too, over the mill of the St. Job farm. Between them was Lieutenant Viscount de Jonghe d'Ardoye's platoon and, established in the chapel, 300 yards to the east of the bridge, a post kept watch on the Graesen and Léau roads.

During the night there was no sign of any approach by the enemy and we were perfectly tranquil. Towards 6.30, the 4th Squadron of the 1st Guides, under Commander van den Branden de Reeth, arrived. His men were tired out after a very difficult reconnaissance. They took some rest and supplied themselves with fresh provisions before occupying the northern sector.

Towards 7 o'clock, I made an inspection of the positions. The defence did not reach sufficiently near Geet-Betz. I therefore sent Baron de Crombrughe (a pupil of the Military School) with about ten horsemen, about 300 or 400 yards further north. At another place, I discovered a little foot-bridge which I ordered to be surrounded with brambles pulled up from the neighbouring estates. This passage was thus

rendered impracticable. The soldiers were now at their posts everywhere, impatient to fight and anxious to distinguish themselves.

On my return along the Gette, I heard a detonation. It was Lieutenant d'Ursel firing on some German soldiers, who were hidden in the woods a few yards away. I armed myself with a carbine and very soon caught sight of two Germans crouching down, preparing to shoot us. I brought one of them down and d'Ursel accounted for the other. After shooting for a few minutes, we rendered several of our adversaries *hors de combat*. Suddenly a ball whizzed by and I heard a slight snapping noise to my right. On turning my head, I saw d'Ursel stretched inanimate on the slope of the trench. He appeared to be dead. One of the Cavalry, Simon, approached and raised the poor man's *colback*. A gaping wound was to be seen at the back of the unfortunate officer's head. What a painful impression, and what a feeling of intense sadness a chief feels on seeing one of his bravest officers fall at his side!

The combat was now going on all along the line and many balls whizzed by our ears. I hurried to the Dubois farm and ordered Commander van den Branden to bring his horses to the rendezvous to the west of the station, and to occupy the trenches to the north of the bridge, immediately, with as many men as possible, while the Squadron of the 2nd Guides continued to defend those on the south. After sending a patrol on horseback to Glabeck, to watch the stream between this hamlet and the Gette, I sent the doctors from the relief post to fetch d'Ursel and attend to him. The combat was violent, the enemy sending us bullets and shrapnels all the time. Our

men answered with great precision. All the enemy sharp-shooters who ventured out of the wood were brought down. Fortunately, towards 8 o'clock, Quartermaster Bonnejonne, of the 1st Chasseurs, arrived with a machine-gun. This was placed to the south of the bridge, under the direction of Lieutenant de Jonghe.

A few minutes later, I received the following order by telephone: "In case the line of the river should be forced, rally at Grootenbosch, to go to Vroen and Kersbeck-Miscom," and at the same time the following notice: "Commander of Squadron of 2nd Guides at Budingen. By order of General commanding Cavalry Division, you pass under my orders, and have for mission to defend, to the uttermost, Budingen bridge. A machine-gun is at your service. Communicate with me at Geet-Betz.—Colonel 1st Guides."

As I had the direction of the Budingen combat, I took these orders for myself. On going again through the trenches to the south of the bridge, I came to the spot where d'Ursel had been hit. The Lieutenant was lying at the foot of the slope and seemed to be asleep. An almost imperceptible wound marked the corner of his left eye with a red spot.

"Well, d'Ursel," I said, "how do you feel?"

Before he had even opened his eyes, he answered: "Ah, it is you, Major?"

I was surprised to see that his eyes were clear and animated.

"Are you suffering much?" I asked.

"No, not much," he answered.

"I have given orders that you are to be taken to the relief post," I said. "With good care, you will soon be yourself again." He thanked me and then

said: "If I should not get through, will you tell my wife that my last thought was of her."

I promised, but assured him that his wound was not at all grave and that the doctors would soon dress it. On seeing him perfectly conscious and calm, able to talk quite easily, I hoped that the ball had only gone round the skull, and that the wound at the back of the head was merely a slit caused by the exit of the projectile. On leaving him, I gave orders for the removal of the wounded man. Unfortunately, the order could not be carried out, as the German attack now became more violent and more decisive. The enemy's shrapnels reached our trenches and the number of the assailants increased every minute. At the chapel, the observation post had been compelled to fall back, and there were masses of enemy foot-soldiers there, who were being mown down by our machine-gun and by the platoons of Lieutenant de Jonghe and of Lieutenant d'Ursel. It was then a quarter past nine. A fresh order now reached me: "In case the river should be forced, rally at Vroen.—Colonel 1st Guides."

As I had previously received instructions to hold out to the uttermost, I considered it was my duty to resist still. My men were behaving admirably, but some of them declared that they heard balls whistling behind them.

"You are mistaken," I said to them, "what you hear are the balls against the walls of the houses near."

Our machine-gun was now choked and could not be used for a time. Quartermaster Bonnejonne was wounded. Lieutenant de Jonghe managed to repair the mechanism of the gun and went on firing himself.

At 9.30, I went to the village square, where Commander van den Branden was stationed. Two shells

burst a few yards away from us. Just at this moment, Brigadier Desterbeck, of the 4th Squadron of 1st Guides, who was on patrol with Glabeck, hurried to me to tell me that an enemy Company, preceded by a number of sharp-shooters, was coming along by the railway line from Geet-Betz towards Budingen.

This changed the situation, as superior forces would attack my flank rendering our resistance useless. I gave the order to retreat and mentioned Grootenbosch as our rallying point.

Some Germans already occupied houses in the villages, and others had reached the big farm and the buildings to the west of the halt. The conditions of the retreat of our two Squadrons were therefore against us, as, in order to get to their horses, my men had to cross a space which was now being fired on by the adversary. This was a bad piece of ill-luck. Whilst the fight had been going on, some of our horses, terrified by the noise of the firing and by the bursting of the shrapnels, had escaped from their keepers and were galloping about on the plain. A wild chase now took place, in order that my men should capture their mounts. When they were once more in their saddles and the retreat had commenced, the Germans, hidden in the farms, fired on them to the best of their ability. Fortunately, their aim was not good, so that only a few of our men were hit, more or less seriously. Captain Commander de Favereau had his left arm fractured and his horse killed under him.

The moment was critical, as the enemy foot-soldiers, more and more numerous in the adjacent houses, continued firing, although nearly always unsuccessfully. If their aim had been good, not one of us would have escaped. There was no time to lose and

a rapid gallop saved our Squadrons from the enemy projectiles.

As I was one of the last to leave the spot where the combat had taken place, when I went, at full speed, to the place where the horses had been left, men and mounts had started. Only Quartermaster Keucker de Wattlet and two or three others were there. It was impossible to find my horse. To avoid danger, as the bullets were whistling through the air on every side, I took refuge behind a house. Luckily, a horse was just passing. I caught it, sprang into the saddle and set off at a gallop in the direction of Grootenbosch, across the open country. I was almost grazed by hundreds of bullets. It is perfectly incomprehensible that I should have escaped uninjured. I drew up near a brick-kiln, and called out to the various isolated horsemen who rode past. About forty men were soon with me, when an important group of other Guides joined us, and told me of the presence of Cavalry between Dries and Miscom. At the head of these men, I went off in the direction of Hoogen, a hundred yards to the east of Grootenbosch, where I met Lieutenant de Formanoir with his platoon. I at once gave orders to this officer to reconnoitre the Cavalry we had heard was on the plain. Twenty minutes later he returned, telling me that it was the 1st Regiment of Guides on the way to Kersbeck-Miscom. It was then about 12 o'clock.

It will be of interest here to give an extract from a letter sent to me by Dr. Lepape, who was wounded during the combat and taken prisoner.

"At the beginning of the engagement," he said, "I was with Dr. Spelkens, near the Dubois Farm, which we had converted, as well as we could, into a relief

post. We each went our way, in order to make final arrangements about getting the wounded in as promptly as possible. Just then, only a few rare balls whizzed over the road, but there was firing, parallel with the railway line, at the horses grouped between the farm and the railway. It was here that I was first called for, and, whilst I was dressing wounds, I saw the helter-skelter among the horses, which were rearing and pulling at their tethers, in order to get away. It was all in vain that their keepers and the farriers endeavoured to soothe them. Afterwards, they tried to rally them in the direction of the level crossing. I saw Gevaert, the farrier, killed by a shot in his forehead. I was just getting up, as I saw my efforts were all in vain, when I was hit in the knee by a projectile. Fortunately, after extracting this and bathing my knee, I was able to continue my service. When our soldiers were retreating, I saw that they were being followed, at about a hundred yards' distance, by men in grey uniforms who were creeping along by the railroad. My orderly now came rushing back to tell me that we were retreating. I went into the farm and destroyed all the papers which the sub-officers had left there, when surprised by the alert. Among these papers were officers' lists, papers with the regiment headings, diaries of the campaign, letters, etc. I then went off to join the troops. I was unwise enough to spring on to a horse without thinking of my leg, so that a few yards farther on I fell off and fractured a rib. When I came to myself, all my papers and my weapons had disappeared, most of the houses were in flames, and a few Belgians, inside one of the houses, were still firing. A little while later, I saw troops of Infantry with machine-guns and cannons filing along for

about two hours. I remember a few things that I noticed:

"1st. The German officers made their men believe that we were French and not Belgians (the red trousers served as a proof).

"2nd. The doors and windows of the houses were systematically forced with the butt end of guns, and the dwellings were set on fire by means of plugs piled up in packets, that certain soldiers were carrying. In a few seconds the flame appeared and spread rapidly.

"3rd. The Germans wanted to shoot the prisoners, one of whom was a Quartermaster, because they had fired from a window, and this they said was contrary to the laws of warfare. As I could speak a little German, I endeavoured to interfere and, for my intervention, I received some heavy blows. I do not know how the matter ended.

"The medical service was perfect. The service of burying was extremely faulty. The grave-diggers did not trouble about the Belgian dead, leaving them to be buried by the inhabitants. Needless to say they were robbed."

As regards Lieutenant d'Ursel, I knew he had been wounded under the left temple, but I heard that he was dead when I was at St. Trond. According to information that I received, when the body of this officer of the Guides was identified, he was wounded in the face and heart.

From this account, we see that the Germans attacked the Budingen bridge with considerable forces, that the two Squadrons of Guides resisted with the greatest bravery, and that, in compliance with their instructions, they *defended to the uttermost* the passage of the

Gette. To my deep regret, I was obliged to leave Lieutenant d'Ursel on the battle-field. But I affirm that, at the time I left him, he had only one wound in the head and that if he was wounded afterwards in the heart, he had been killed *when wounded*, in contempt of the laws of warfare. /

CHAPTER X

Aerschot

(August 19, 1914)

**FROM THE REPORT OF CAPTAIN COMMANDER GILSON, COMMAND-
ING THE 4TH COMPANY OF THE 1ST BATTALION OF THE
9TH LINE REGIMENT**

The Belgian Army, two Corps strong, had held its observation position from the 5th to the 18th of August. It had resisted the attacks of the enemy cavalry and light troops. When attacked by eleven enemy Corps and three Cavalry Divisions, about 500,000 men, supported by 600 machine-guns and 1800 cannons, it fell back on Antwerp. A lively rear-guard action took place between the 11th German Corps and the 9th and 14th Line Regiments in the direction of Aerschot.

ON the 18th of August, 1914, the 9th Line Regiment was entrusted with protecting the right flank of the campaign army, which was falling back in the direction of Antwerp. The regiment left Kessel-Loo at 2.30 in the afternoon, reached Aerschot at 7 o'clock and took up its position to the north, on the right bank of the Démer. The 1st Battalion faced the Aerschot-Hersselt road; the 2nd, a little to the east, defending Doorenberg, a country house, inhabited in time of peace, it is said, by a German officer; the 3rd was first held in reserve, but after reconnaissance of the place, two of its Companies fell back, in order to

rally the 1st and 2nd Battalions and cover the retreat. The information which reached us, from time to time, was to the effect that the Germans were advancing by the Aerschot-Hersselt road, occupied by the 4th Company of the 1st Battalion. The Commander, Captain Gilson, an officer of great bravery, who had given proof of what he was capable in the Congo, at once endeavoured to consolidate his position by defence works; barricades, beams, and heaps of earth were brought to obstruct the level crossing of the Antwerp-Hasselt railroad; barbed wire was stretched across the threatened road, the plains of which could be swept by two machine-guns, placed on the right and left and protected by grass earthworks.

As to the Company, it was disposed in the following manner: the 1st Platoon, under Lieutenant Fauconier, was ranged along the Aerschot-Herenthals railroad; the 2nd Platoon, under Lieutenant Jacquet, and the 3rd Platoon, under Adjutant Theys, took up their position along the curved embankment of the Hersselt road, one of them guarding the west sector and the other the east. A watch-out post, composed of twelve men, under the command of First Sergeant Scheenaerts, was placed six hundred yards away from milestone 2, near the Aurondenbergh Mill, to the summit of which an observer climbed. Finally, sentinels and patrols went on further to the front and were stationed on the flanks, in order to avoid surprises of any kind.

On the 19th of August, towards five o'clock in the morning, the observer signalled the approach of a column of German Infantry and Cavalry on the Hersselt road. Their scouts soon reached our watch-out post, which fell back. In the distance, could be

heard the characteristic sound of the artillery guns rolling along the pavement.

The enemy's advance guard stopped at the border of the woods, about four hundred yards to the north of the railway, whilst, at the extreme right, six scouts continued their advance in the direction of the level crossing. Commander Gilson told his sharp-shooters to keep in hiding and to let the enemies approach. When he saw them about a hundred yards away, he seized his gun, aimed calmly and deliberately, and brought down three Boches, one after the other. The three others, alarmed, threw themselves into a ditch. Fresh scouts, in greater number this time, replaced them immediately, and the German vanguard Company deployed to the east and west of the road and commenced firing. The Belgians did not reply, but when the enemy, scarcely attempting any concealment, made a bound forwards all along its line, Gilson commanded the opening of fire with rifles and machine-guns. The aim of the latter was so remarkable and so precise that the Commander could not help crying out "Bravo" to the nearest gunner. Under this avalanche, the enemy Company was almost wiped out.

From this moment, the Germans never ceased sending reinforcements to the right and left of their initial deployment. They emerged from the woods, at about three hundred or four hundred yards to the north of the Belgian line, but, as soon as they were in the open, their march was stopped by the fire of their adversaries. Four Companies attempted the passage in vain and retreated into the woods, leaving a great number of their men on the plain. Towards four in the afternoon, the German Artillery, placed beyond the crest of the hill, probably near milestone 3, opened

fire, first on the border of the wood to the north of Aerschot, then more to the south, on the town itself. Some of the shells burst in the Belgian line. Half an hour later, two German machine-guns were put into action and one could hear their "Ta-ra-ta-ra" distinctly in the midst of the detonations of the musketry. On account of the absence of any smoke, though, the Belgians could not discover their exact position.

Finally, Commander Gilson, with his field-glasses, caught sight of one of the enemy machine-guns on a heap of wood. An observer, crouching down, gave the necessary indications to our gunner. He, in his turn, passed the information on for the machine-gun nearest him and to a few sharp-shooters, and, in a few minutes, the German gun was reduced to silence.

The Boches brought up another one, and, in spite of its proximity, Gilson had the greatest difficulty in locating it. As soon as he had done so, thanks again to his field-glasses, he directed the firing himself and brought down two of the enemy gunners.

As they could not succeed in breaking through the Belgian front, the Germans now executed a turning movement in the direction of our left. Three or four Companies crept along the west embankment of the Herenthals railway, whilst other troops came out from the De Heide Woods, situated still farther west. The Artillery, too, came nearer and took position at about seven hundred yards away, on the side of the Mill, the gallery of which concealed an observer. Four guns then executed a rapid firing of shrapnel exactly over the Belgian line; the others continued bombarding the town of Aerschot and its outskirts. On the crest of the hill, to the east, could be seen the outline of grey masses on the way down. In order to

oppose this turning movement, and to prevent the enemy cutting him off, Colonel Flébus, in command of the 9th Line Regiment, sent a Company to occupy the railway line behind Aerschot, at the height of the milestone 23. He would have a safe retreat there, if the position became impossible.

The enemy was concentrating its chief effort, though, on the 4th Company of the 1st Battalion, the men of which had been sustaining a very unequal fight for several hours. Commander Gilson sent a note to the Major by a cyclist, notifying: "4/I severely engaged. Germans outflanking us to the left. Can I count on a reinforcement?" This request was transmitted to the Colonel, who sent a Company to support the 4/I. In order to reach the spot occupied by Commander Gilson, this Company had to cross an open space which was being swept by the enemy Artillery established at Geymelberg. The firing to bar this way made it impossible for the reinforcement to advance. It was all in vain that the men endeavoured to hollow out shelters for themselves, rapidly, as the machine-guns raked the trenches, thus causing many victims. Under these conditions, the Colonel judged a retreat necessary and ordered the different Companies to fall back by the railway, under the protection of the troops placed there in reserve. The despatch bearers, with the order intended for the 4th Company, were killed on their way back, though, and Commander Gilson remained without instructions and without reinforcements. He saw the Companies, occupying his right leave, one after the other, in the direction of Aerschot.

The fate of this single troop, left alone to sustain the brunt of the enemy's onset, is told by Commander Gilson himself in the following words:

"On seeing the various Companies moving off in the direction of Aerschot, I understood that the position of the regiment was impossible. Two explanations came at once to my mind: (a) either the order to retreat has been sent and has not reached me, (b) or the care of protecting the retreat is left officially to me. Considering the precarious situation of the regiment on march under the fire of the German Artillery, a situation which would soon be considerably worse if I ceased to hold back the important forces of the enemy and left them the opportunity of flinging themselves upon our troops, I decided to cover the retreat of the regiment and to fight, if need were, to the last man. In spite of this resolution, in order to encourage my soldiers, I called out to them: 'Courage, hold out a few minutes more. Our comrades will come to the rescue.'

"As no reinforcement arrived, though, my men realised the final sacrifice I was asking of them. In the midst of the uproar of the fray, I reminded them of the promise they had given me at Liège to hold out to the death. 'This is the moment, to know who are brave men!' I added. All who heard me answered with a nod of approval and a gesture of disdain for the Germans. At the same time, I sent my Major two more notes, exposing to him my position and telling him my resolution. They did not reach their destination, the despatch bearers were killed in the street at Aerschot, the entrance to the town being literally under a rain of projectiles.

"Towards seven o'clock, I sent a soldier to the cross-roads to find out if all the regiment had passed southwards. During my retreat, I found his dead body at the entrance to the town, his head nearly blown off

by a shrapnel. I recognised him easily by his wallet of white linen.

"From quarter past seven, we were almost surrounded by forces which I reckon must have been at least ten Companies strong. The firing was so violent that it was impossible for me to communicate with Lieutenant Fauconier's Platoon, forming a defensive angle to my left.

"Towards seven-thirty, Lieutenant Jacquet, placed on the left of the road, called out to me that the position could no longer be held, as the Germans had turned round us and were firing on us from the back. I saw this myself, but I considered that it was too soon to let go, as the enemy might still catch up with the regiment. I told Lieutenant Jacquet, by shouting and by gesture, that we *must* still hold out, in spite of everything. *This officer replied 'Good!' simply by the military salute.*

"The fight continued in the following manner: The Germans had brought up six machine-guns, two on our front, two on our right, and two in the second line. The artillery guns were firing continually, some on the town, and the others on our line. We went on like this until seven fifty-five. One of our machine-guns gave out; it was pierced by balls. I tried to save the second. The gunners endeavoured to draw it back, but, during the few minutes that this was taking place, it was hit by balls and damaged. We flung it into the ditch. The regiment was now out of reach and it remained for me to save those of my men who were still unscathed. A hundred of them, either killed or wounded, were lying on the embankment. They had fallen at their post. Others had gone a few yards farther back before falling. I whistled for the retreat,

giving the command: 'In rank, to the left, we are going to beat a retreat slowly. Adjutant Theys, with your right section, you will protect the rest of the Company.' At that instant, a ball hit me in the face. I made a sign to Lieutenant Fauconier to begin the movement. He started, followed by Jacquet's Platoon, and then by Theys's Platoon with the last section, which I accompanied. The retreat was accomplished without any hurry, by creeping along, which was the only way possible. In spite of this, many of my men fell in the open space that we had to clear before reaching the entrance to the town. This entrance was literally swept by balls and shrapnels. As I was quite the last, behind all the others, with seven men, two of whom were wounded, I took refuge close to a building and fired five cartridges on the enemy who were closing up round us. I took from a dead soldier, the roll of maps of 1/40,000 that I had entrusted to him, and flung it into a well.

"During a lull, we set off again and finally reached the deserted station. We asked for news of the regiment. Some of the inhabitants, wildly excited, assured us that the troops had taken the Louvain road. We followed the railway line in the same direction, crossed some gardens and went by the same road.

"I am proud to testify in the first place to the admirable, intrepid conduct of my three Platoon officers Lieutenant Fauconier, Lieutenant Jacquet and Adjutant Theys. I cannot find words strong enough to tell how heroic and how sublime their conduct was. Under the fiercest fire, they remained absolutely calm and, with utter fearlessness of death, they carried out orders and accomplished, in the most perfect way,

the mission of protection which we had the great honour of receiving. Their *sang-froid*, their spirit of abnegation, their sentiment of comprehension of a sacred duty was transmitted by them to their men. I take the liberty of asking for a token of distinction for these three officers, whether living or dead.

"I do not yet know who has survived of this Company. I only know that the losses must have been very great. I salute, with intense emotion, the memory of the brave men who fell, and I salute, with all respect those who are still living. All of them, and I repeat *all*, behaved as heroes. I would also specially mention those who remained with me at the very last: Quartermaster Sergeant Van Wynendael; Corporal Deltombe, who was wounded; Corporal Fernand Bauwens, and Private Berlens. These four soldiers supported me and, at a given moment, almost carried me during the retreat, when, through loss of blood, I began to feel weak and my sight became dim.

"Commander GEORGES GILSON,
"Provincial Government Ambulance
"Antwerp."

CHAPTER XI

A Few Episodes of the Retreat of Namur

BY CAPTAIN PAULIS, ARTILLERY COMMANDER

The bombardment of Namur commenced on the 21st of August, at 10 o'clock A.M., and was directed simultaneously on the Andoy, Marchevelette, and Cognelée Forts, as well as on the intervals.

During the morning of the 22nd of August, the garrison made dashes in the direction of the besiegers' lines. They were greeted by a violent discharge of musketry and by the fire of machine-guns. Towards 10 o'clock, on the arrival of three French Battalions, an attack on Wartet was attempted, but the troops were compelled to fall back and the bombardment continued without respite.

ON the 23rd of August, at three in the morning, after the hard fighting of the preceding days, overwhelmed by mental and physical fatigue, I had fallen into a troubled sleep. An order which was brought to me roused me completely. The last batteries we had were to be taken to the Citadel, immediately, for the defence of the town redoubt.

This was the end of the resistance. Namur, shattered by the cannon, was living its last hours. The retreat of the active troops was about to commence. A fresh order reached me, telling me to take my detachment of Artillery to Bois-de-Villers and to await instructions there.

In the radiant brightness of that beautiful summer morning, whilst the shooting of the guns and the roar of the cannon was to be heard on all sides, I led my little troop in the direction of Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse. My men were silent and sorrowful. I saw the anguish in my own heart reflected on their faces. At Liège, after the most heroic defence, we had seen our men obliged to fall back before the foreigner. At Namur, it was to be a repetition of the same thing. There, as here, we had hoped and hoped, up to the last minute, that friendly reinforcements would arrive. It was different here though! From Liège, our retreat had been towards the centre of our own country, we were at home and we knew that we were going to join our comrades of the army in campaign. From Namur, alas, we should be moving towards the frontier, getting farther and farther away from our fellow-soldiers, from our friends, and from our families.

After Liège, every man in our detachment had answered to the roll-call. On leaving Namur, we thought sorrowfully of those of our comrades who were sleeping for ever at the border of the Grandes-Salles Wood, or who were dying, in pain, in hospital beds.

"Courage! though," I said to myself, "we must keep our hearts up. We must throw a veil over the past and look ahead. At any rate, I must save the brave men under my care."

The information I had with regard to the enemy was very vague. The Germans were said to be stopped at the Sambre, on one side, and repulsed in the Dinant neighbourhood, some distance from the Meuse, on the other. The truth, as we were soon to see, was quite different. At Bois-de-Villers, where I arrived

towards nine o'clock, I noted that there was intense firing in the direction of Sart-St. Laurent. There was no doubt possible. The Germans had forced the passages of the Sambre.

I made a hasty reconnaissance in the direction of the valley of the Meuse. The inhabitants told me that the French had placed outposts as far as Profondeville, but that they had taken them away the evening before, and that enemy patrols were moving about on the right bank.

It was, therefore, impossible to start with my column along the road from Profondeville to Dinant. This road, which skirts the river, is commanded, only a short distance away, by the heights of the right bank.

There was only one thing to be done, and that was to return to Namur for instructions.

At one o'clock in the afternoon, I was back again as far as the St. Héribert Fort. The Commander informed me that he no longer had telephonic communication with the Governor of the position. He could only give me all the information he had from private sources. The Germans had crossed the Sambre in great masses and were being held, at the present moment, between Fosse and St. Gérard, by a French army. The Meuse also had been forced by the enemy at Dinant.

The situation was, therefore, most critical for the Namur garrison. It would probably be completely encircled and it only had one road left for retreat towards France.

I decided to go to Ermeton-sur-Biert, through Arbre and Bioul, and await events there.

We accordingly set off and, as I was mounting my horse, I gave one last look at the town. The sight was

both imposing and terrible. In Namur itself, many of the houses were burning. The Citadel seemed to have a halo round it, formed by the fleecy bursting of the shrapnels. Farther away, the villages of Champion, Bonnine, and Bouge were in flames. Muffled detonations, repeated by the echoes, reverberated on every side. On all the roads from Namur and from Flawinne, could be seen the heads of the column of troops of the 4th Division, who were endeavouring to escape from the grasp of the enemy. Poor Namur! With heavy hearts, we then began that long retreat, which was to lead us, by Belgian and French roads, to the environs of Paris. I arrived at Ermeton-sur-Biert towards half past eight in the evening. I went a little further on than the village and fixed on an oat-field for our bivouac. An uninterrupted firing could be heard from a northerly direction. The march of the German troops was indicated, over half the horizon, by the villages and farms in flames. In a south-easterly direction, an immense glow, in strong contrast to the darkness of the night, revealed the incredible crime of Dinant.

Whilst some of my gunners were dressing the wounds of half a dozen French soldiers whom we had picked up at Denée, and the drivers were getting some oats for their tired horses, I remained at the roadside, anxiously questioning the dark figures who passed by in the night. The most contradictory rumours were circulating. According to some, the British troops had driven the Germans back, between Mons and Charleroi. According to others, on the contrary, we had already been turned by these same Germans.

I had been at my observation post more than an hour, when some French batteries passed by at a quick trot. There was no doubt now; it was very evident that the French were retreating. Tired though we were, it was indispensable that we should follow the movement. We, therefore, set out once more. It took us three hours to go the five miles which separate Ermeton from Rosée, as the road was blocked by waggons, trucks, refugees' carts, and vehicles of all sorts. They were advancing with the greatest difficulty, three or four abreast. Numbers of refugees on foot, men, women, and children, from the neighbouring villages, had slipped in among the horses and vehicles, adding considerably to the confusion. The night was particularly dark, and this darkness was only relieved by the distant light of the flaming houses and, from time to time, by the bright flashes of the St. Héribert Fort search-lights, which seemed to be sending us a last farewell message. We reached Philippeville at four o'clock the following morning. During the night, my column had increased in numbers. Soldiers of all arms, who had lost their regiments, had joined us, feeling instinctively that they were lost if they had not an officer in command.

The first person I met, on arriving at Philippeville, was Duruy, the French Battalion Chief, whom I had known before the war as Military Attaché at Brussels. Three months later, he was killed in Flanders, whilst marching bravely at the head of a Colonial Regiment.

I explained my situation to him quickly and asked for news of the battle. What he told me was by no means reassuring. The Allies had been crushed

by the invading stream and they were falling back, inch by inch.

I soon received instructions from the French officer in command of the district. I was to collect all the Belgian troops now in Philippeville and take them to Rocroi. We were to be in Rocroi that same day.

Twenty-two miles to march with troops which had been marching already for twenty-four hours! The order was definite, though, and I felt myself that it was necessary. Once more we set out.

Before leaving, I went and shook hands silently with my brave comrade, Hankar. Only the day before he was a lively Sub-Lieutenant from the Military School, and now he was lying in a motor-ambulance, with his foot smashed by a shell. I could do absolutely nothing for him. What a terrible thing war is!

I also took the wounded French soldiers we had brought from Denée to an ambulance.

I will not describe the Calvary of that long march and the sufferings of my exhausted soldiers. It was eight o'clock at night when we reached Rocroi, and the men were then able to take their first meal that day.

We had to think of the horses, too, and to get some oats for them. I plead guilty to having acted in a manner that was incorrect, but I hope I may be forgiven for it under the circumstances. At that late hour, the forage stores were closed, and the man in charge did not consider himself obliged to supply me until the next day.

Necessity knows no law. In accordance with this precept, somewhat lax, but indispensable in time of war, I ordered my men to break open the door and

take, *manu militari*, the oats necessary. I left a receipt, quite honestly, for what I had taken.

I spent the night, with my men, in the big Square of the town, but I could not close my eyes. Too many thoughts crowded to my mind, for, from what I had heard and seen on the way, I was convinced that the Germans would soon be at Rocroi and that we should have to move on southwards.

Where were we to go though? How were we to rejoin the Belgian army, when we did not know where it was? I had not even a map of the district.

As soon as it was daylight, my first idea was to try to get a map, but how was I to find it in a town that was asleep? I knocked at several doors, but there was not a map to be had. Presently, I met a young cyclist who had a road-map of Northern France. I am about to confess my second indelicate act. I said to the young cyclist:

"How much did you give for your map?"

"Three francs," he replied.

"I will give you five francs for it."

"I won't sell it," he answered, "as I cannot get another one."

"I will give you ten francs," I insisted.

"No," he replied.

"Then I shall have to take it," I said and, before the cyclist had time to recover from his surprise, I took his precious map and made off like the thief I was.

After examining various projects, I decided on going to Rethel. There was an important junction of railways and roads there. I could communicate by wire with our Military Attaché of Paris and receive instructions.

We set out once again, but our march was slow, as my detachment was composed of soldiers of all arms, most of whom were on foot.

The problem of food for my men was causing me serious anxiety, when, a few miles from Rocroi, I came across a column with food, stationed in a little village. A sub-officer, whom I had sent on reconnaissance, came back telling me that the officer in command of this column had given orders that no food was to be given to Belgian troops, except in case of a requisition written by the General commanding the 4th Belgian Division.

I have already confessed to breaking into forage stores and to theft. I must now confess to an abuse of confidence. I signed an order for food with my own name, preceded by the following words: "By order of the General commanding the 4th Belgian Division."

I had no right to do this, if I am to be quite frank. I obtained the food though and, as will be seen later on, Lieutenant General Michel himself reaped some advantage from my indelicacy.

The scene took place at Liart, where we arrived the second day after this incident.

Taught by experience, I always arranged for our bivouac to be near places where food columns were quartered. I sent a subordinate at once to establish a *liaison* between this column and mine.

One night when we were quartered near Liart, my *liaison* agent, when sending my food, let me know that a goods train was to return empty to Rheims, the following day. He had made arrangements with the military Commander at the station for me to make use of this transport.

Glad to spare my men fatigue, and to gain time, I accepted the offer. I did not wait for daylight, but set out at once for Liart.

A surprise was in store for us. Lieutenant-General Michel was there, at the head of his Division. There was no question now of our making use of the train, as it was, of course, to be reserved for the troops on foot. The mounted soldiers were to go to Laon by the ordinary way. A column was formed under the orders of Colonel Iweins.

Whilst the men were eating, I remembered that I had some beefsteak in reserve. General Michel, who was passing near, honoured me by coming to our table and sharing our meal.

Do you remember this, General? I did not own then that it was, in reality, you inviting me, as I had obtained that meat, thanks to "an order" from you.

It took us two days to reach Laon and nothing occurred to interfere with us on our way.

One thing surprised us, though. We did not meet any French troops. We met columns with food, with ammunition, and various carts with accessories, but absolutely no fighting troops.

Our surprise increased when we had passed Laon. Neither at Soissons, Château-Thierry, Coulommiers, nor anywhere else, along that long road which led to the south-east of Paris, did we meet either Infantry, Artillery, or Cavalry. We began to wonder where the French army was, or whether a French army existed?

It was not until a few days later, after the victory of the Marne, that we understood General Joffre's wonderful manœuvre. We will not anticipate, though, so we must return to Laon.

We stayed there two days and we took advantage of this time for reorganising our column.

The cannons and waggons of the old pattern were packed and sent to the south of France; the horses were divided among the existing units, and all the men we did not need were sent to Rouen. In this way, we formed a column of Cavalry, Artillery, Gendarmerie, and accessory services.

I was no longer in command, but, as there was a question of taking part in the operations of the French army, I did not like the idea of being sent to a dépôt.

I asked for a place now vacant as Deputy Commander of a group and I was fortunate enough to obtain it.

We left Laon rather suddenly and went in the direction of Soissons. In my new function, I had to form the vanguard. With a few others, I would arrive unexpectedly in the villages, where our foreign uniforms generally created alarm, as we were taken for German patrols.

In order to avoid mistakes, I used to send a horseman on in front to announce the arrival of friends.

The astrakhan *talpack* that I wore surprised the inhabitants of the villages and I overheard the following conversation:

"You see the one with a fur cap. He is an officer of the Russian vanguard." Another person probably better informed, with regard to distances, replied:

"Impossible, the Russians could not be here yet."

It is only fair to say that all the papers then were announcing, in big letters, formidable advances of the Russian army.

The day after leaving Laon, we arrived at Sermoise-sur-Aisne. An English patrol was there, under the

command of an officer, who told us that German forces had been signalled to the north of the Aisne.

Colonel Iweins, who had already had this information, told the English officer that some squadrons had been sent to reconnoitre and that news was awaited before authorising a bivouac there. He added that he would send an officer with the information he received to the English General then at Soissons. As I acted as interpreter and arrived with the vanguard, Colonel Iweins entrusted me with this mission.

He told me, too, that the detachment that he commanded was to start the following day by rail from Soissons. I was entrusted with the reconnaissance of the station and was to wait there for his arrival.

The squadrons soon returned without having anything special to report. The bivouac was therefore organised and I started. I was delighted at having this mission as, when I had accomplished it, I should be able to dine on something else than rabbit, which had been our food for several days, and I should also have a good hotel bed instead of sleeping on straw at the bivouac.

I was accompanied only by my orderly and, with a light heart, smoking a cigarette, I arrived in Soissons after an enjoyable ride. It was just getting dark. There was not a person in the street, and a death-like silence prevailed. I wondered what this meant?

Finally, I met an English cycling platoon. The officer in command informed me that the Germans were at the gates of the town, on the other side of the Aisne.

"Surely," I said, "there must be some mistake, as there is an English General at Soissons."

"We beat a retreat in a south-westerly direction," replied the officer, "and we form the extreme left rear."

I went at once to the station and found that all the rolling stock had been removed. After some time, I found one of the station officials.

"Have you been informed that some Belgian troops are coming to Soissons to-morrow to take the train?" I asked. "To-morrow!" exclaimed the man, in amazement. "Why, the Boches are there, on the other side of the river. The station has been evacuated and . . ."

I did not stay to hear the end of his sentence, but rushed off to the Prefecture of police, where I was assured that the German vanguards were quite near the town.

"But surely there must be some military authority here in Soissons!" I said.

"Perhaps you may find the Commander of arms. He lives at the house with the stone steps, in the first street to the left."

I went there and found him.

"Colonel," I said, "I have just come from Sermoise and have a communication for an English General whom I expected to find here. I am also to make arrangements for some Belgian troops to take the train from here to-morrow."

"But, are you not aware that the Germans may enter the town from one minute to another?" he asked. "I have given orders for the bridges to be blown up as soon as they are in sight, and immediately after that I am starting for Rheims. The English

Headquarters have been transferred, to-day, about ten miles away. I should advise you to take your communication there and to stay there yourself. The road is not safe. . . . "

At that very moment, I heard some loud explosions. The Aisne bridges had been blown up.

"*Au revoir*," said the Colonel, getting into his motor-car, "and good luck!"

I remained there a moment half dazed. The communication I had was worthless, and dangerous too, as it gave wrong information.

The only thing that remained was to ride, at full speed, back to Sermoise and warn my chief there of the danger that threatened us.

An hour later, I arrived there breathless. Colonel Iweins was dictating his instructions for the journey of the following day. I informed him immediately of what I had learnt at Soissons.

The bivouac was at once broken up and Major Joostens set out in his motor-car to get instructions from the French Headquarters. He returned soon after with orders to start immediately for Château-Thierry.

The main road from Sermoise to Château-Thierry passes through Soissons. There is another way, but it is not practicable for artillery, and it would have caused us delay at a time when every moment was precious.

Colonel Iweins decided to send his horsemen to guard the passages of the Aisne. During that time the batteries and the vehicles with the accessories were to gallop through Soissons. The squadrons were to fall back and they would thus be able to protect the retreat.

This plan was carried out and only just in time. The gendarmerie waggon, which was a little behind, was attacked and captured by the Germans.

On the Château-Thierry road, I saw once more the same scenes of desolation that I had already witnessed in Belgium: I mean the exodus of the population. Crowds of people and of animals, all hurrying along and knocking against each other; vehicles colliding with each other and barring the road, as the drivers, in their mad hurry to escape, blocked the way and increased the confusion. The most heart-rending of all the miseries of war are those which afflict the weak and unoffending.

On this long journey, I came across Belgian families from Hainault, who had been driven out of their peaceful villages by the barbarians, and had been wandering for weeks. Wherever they had found a temporary refuge, they had been once more hunted out, and they were now going along, resigned to their fate, towards the unknown. When would the hour of deliverance ring out for them and for all of us?

We stopped a night at Château-Thierry, and the following day our column was divided; one detachment went in the direction of Coulommiers and the other in the direction of La Ferté-Gaucher.

I was with the latter detachment, under the command of Major Capillon, and, as usual, I was responsible for the vanguard. The batteries arrived at our halting-place rather late, and it was dark when the installation was finished.

I was very tired, and was just going to rest for a time, when I was informed that the two detachments were to start for Havre, by rail, the following day. Further orders were to be given us later on.

When everyone was lying down, before going to rest myself, I decided to go as far as the station. It was as though I had a presentiment, for, on arriving there, at ten o'clock exactly, I found the station-master at the telephone. What I heard startled me. The Germans were at Château-Thierry. We had left there in the morning and they had arrived in the afternoon. They had bombarded the station, left the town, and were on the way towards Coulommiers and La Ferté-Gaucher.

I rushed to the telephone and asked for communication with Coulommiers. I told them to fetch an officer. Major Joostens was soon there.

"Do you know that Château-Thierry has been occupied to-day by the Germans, and that they have now left the town?" I said.

"What are you telling me?" he replied. "It is impossible. We have come fifty miles from Soissons and an army cannot go along at that rate."

"It is a fact nevertheless. Make enquiries at once, as we run the risk of being taken."

"Wait there, I will telephone to you as soon as I get any information."

A quarter of an hour later, Major Joostens confirmed what I had told him and informed me that he was having trains sent immediately to La Ferté-Gaucher. He told me to give the alarm and to commence embarking the troops during the night.

Never, I imagine, has any man alone, made as much noise in the night as I did that night at La Ferté-Gaucher. Thinking that we were far enough away from the enemy, our lodgings were separated from each other, from one end of the town to the other. For the first time for a month, each man had a bed. It

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can readily be imagined that it was no easy task to wake everyone up.

At half-past twelve, the first battery arrived at the station, and the embarking of the troops commenced immediately. On account of various faulty installations, it took a considerable amount of time. At mid-day, our scouts informed us of the approach of the Germans. We were prepared to evacuate by road what we could not send by rail, but fortunately this was not necessary, as the enemy halted a few miles away from La Ferté-Gaucher.

The command of the last contingent was given to me. At four o'clock, all the waggons were on the trucks. I then embarked the Gendarmerie Platoon, which served as my support, and the train started.

It was an immense relief to me when we were once on the way, as we then knew that we should be able to join the Belgian army, and do our share towards defending our country.

Coulommiers and La Ferté-Gaucher were, as everyone knows, the extreme points reached on French soil by the German invasion.

From Havre, we went by boat to Zeebrugge and from Zeebrugge to Antwerp by rail. We found our Infantry Regiments there, as they had preceded us. The 4th Division was re-formed and it contributed gloriously, later on, to the defence of Antwerp and the Yser.

I dedicate these pages to the soldiers who were under me during this period of the war. They were composed of men of the oldest classes (the 14th and 15th) and of young volunteers. All of them behaved with the greatest courage.

Several weeks after the events I have just related,

when I was no longer the direct chief of these brave soldiers, I received from them the following letter, which moved me to tears. It is a letter which I shall ever keep as my most treasured recompense:

"VIEUX DIEU (FORT 4),
"21. 9. 14.

"TO OUR COMMANDER PAULIS:

"The sub-officers of your old group beg you to accept, in their name and in the name of all the Brigadiers and Privates who have been under your orders, their respectful homage and the assurance of their sincerest feelings of gratitude, in remembrance of the way you led them under fire, and saved them during the retreats from Liége and Namur.

"Rest assured, Commander, that you will never, never be forgotten by us, and that your name will ever be included in our ardent wishes for the welfare of our King, our Country and our families."

[Here follow the signatures.]

"PERVYSE, October 15, 1915."

CHAPTER XII

Death of Corporal Trésignies

FROM THE ACCOUNT GIVEN BY FIRST SERGEANT-MAJOR—OF
THE 2ND REGIMENT OF UNMOUNTED CHASSEURS

On the 20th of August, the Belgian army, supported by the line of the Antwerp Forts, took position on the Rupel and the Nèthe. In front of it, the 3rd and 9th German Corps were quartered. On learning that violent fighting was going on on the Sambre and in the direction of Mons, a *sortie* was decided upon for the 25th and 26th of August. The 6th Division took Hofstade and the Schiplaeken Woods. The 1st and 5th Divisions took Sempst, Weerde, and Eppegheem; but, on the left wing, the 2nd Division could not gain the left bank of the Louvain canal and, in the centre, the 6th Division could not occupy Elewyt. The army, therefore, returned to the retrenched camp.

On the 26th of August, 1914, towards nine in the morning, a platoon of the 2nd Unmounted Chasseurs, under the command of First Sergeant-Major—occupied a trench, constructed by the Germans, at Pont-Brûlé, on the south bank of the Willebroeck Canal. A continual rain of balls from the enemy's lines soon made the position impossible, even for our men who were firing as they lay on the ground. There was no retreat possible. It was necessary, therefore, at all costs, to cross the canal. There was a bridge only a few yards away, but its platform was

raised and the crank of the windlass was on the opposite bank.

The Sergeant attempted to construct a raft, but this was almost impossible, as the necessary material was lacking and the enemy's firing was too frequent and violent. He was compelled to give up this idea.

"A good swimmer who will volunteer to cross the canal!" he cried out.

"Present!" replied Private Trésignies, getting up from the ground.

"It is to go and lower the bridge, my boy."

"Right, Sergeant."

Quite tranquilly, Trésignies wrote on a slip of paper the following words for his wife: "Adieu, it is for the King." He handed the message to his officer, slipped off his clothes, and sprang into the water.

Whilst he was swimming, the Sergeant called out to him: "Trésignies, in the name of the Colonel, I appoint you Corporal."

Trésignies smiled in answer to the words, crossed the canal, reached the other bank, climbed on to the abutment of the bridge, and seized the crank. He first turned it the wrong way, raising the bridge still higher, but, on seeing his mistake, he turned it the opposite way. The bridge slowly descended. The man's tall figure stood out against the horizon, looking like an antique statue. The firing from all sides was now aimed at him. His thighs and his arms were hit. The blood spurted from his wounds and ran down his body. He continued turning, as though nothing had happened, determined to accomplish his work of deliverance. He went on turning and turning until his heart was pierced and he fell down on the blue stone. After a few nervous twitches, his body re-



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mained still and lifeless, the head hanging down. . . .

.
In remembrance of this hero, the Municipal Council of Antwerp decided that one of the streets of the capital should be named after Corporal Trésignies, and that a subscription should be opened for the benefit of his widow and two children.

CHAPTER XIII

The First Attack of the Retrenched Camp of Antwerp

(September 4, 1914)

**BY FATHER HÉNUSSE, S. J., ARMY CHAPLAIN TO THE 84TH
ARTILLERY BATTERY**

ON that day, the Staff of the 5th Division had decided on an offensive reconnaissance, starting from Willebroeck and going towards Lippeloo. Towards 7 in the morning, we heard that the Germans had arrived in force at Breendonck. Commandant C——transmitted this information to the Staff, who, no doubt, gave orders to the Cavalry to verify the information, as the hour fixed for our departure passed, and we were still there for a long time afterwards. The foot-soldiers were yawning behind their piled arms and the gunners were strolling about near the cannons.

Towards 10 o'clock, the order finally arrived for us to start, but the itinerary was modified. We were to go by way of Sauvegarde and Pullaer, instead of leaving Willebroeck along the network of barbed wire.

The column set out. The 16th Brigade of mixed forces advanced along the narrow road which is the

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ordinary way to the line of forts. Towards 12.30, it was preparing to take up a position, when suddenly, four detonations were heard and four shrapnels exploded in front of the Artillery, just near the Commander of the group, who saw his cyclist hit, his men wounded, and horses either fall or take fright.

The astonishment was so great, that a slight confusion ensued. An explanation was almost as quickly obtained. The enemy was making a sudden attack on the double interval, Breendonck-Letterheide-Liezele. An order was immediately given to the Artillery to occupy the positions organised for the defence of the said intervals. The 84th Battery had its Sector limited by the canal of Willebroeck and Breendonck, the 83rd the Sector comprised between Breendonck and Letterheide-Liezele, and the 82nd the Sector Letterheide-Liezele.

"Wheel round!" was the command given and, on the narrow road, the wheel round took place in perfect order.

Whilst the batteries were going to their positions, the Commanders went just as quickly to their observation posts. That of the Commander of the 83rd was an extraordinary post. Between two poplars, a platform, eight yards high, had been made, protected by a shield. It was reached by a huge ladder and was big and strong, as was necessary for the man who was to use it. When he reached it, the balls were already whizzing from all sides and the huge shrapnels were bursting above the Forts. It was evident that the Germans had begun the attack with their masses, without waiting for the preliminary artillery preparation.

The Commander climbed quickly on to his perch

and began scrutinising the horizon with his field-glasses. In the direction of Breendonck, the firing range had been cleared for about eight hundred yards in advance of the line of Forts. All the houses but one had been destroyed. Farther away, in the background, there were isolated farms, the roads leading to the village, mills, and clusters of trees; in the foreground, immense fields of asparagus a yard high.

Suddenly, a movement was to be seen on the road leading from the village. An enemy column was advancing there. It broke up into little groups, in order to reach sheltered places. This was just the moment to seize the telephone and order a quick fire from the battery 1700 yards in the rear. Unfortunately, the telephone had been taken off on account of the reconnaissance that morning, and torture now began for the unfortunate Commander.

To have a mass of several thousand men in front of him and, there, behind him, the four fire-spitters which could sow death and carnage among that mass, and not be able to make a sign to them, not be able to transmit the order! Tantalus had nothing like this to endure! The Commander's eyes were fixed first on the advancing enemy, and then on the plain where the telephonists ought to be unrolling the wire, the precious wire. . . . He could see nothing but the green grass and the sunshine. . . .

Finally, he could stand it no longer and he clambered down from his observatory, saluted by a volley of balls, which only did harm to the poplar branches. He rushed to his horse, which was hidden in the little wood at the back and rode at full speed in the direction of the telephonists. As soon as they appeared, he gave his orders in feverish haste and returned, at the

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same rapid pace, to his observatory. The question now was would he reach the top of the ladder or not? The balls came whizzing along, hitting the steps of the huge ladder. One, two, three, and he sprang on to it and began to mount. With a thrill of anguish, he continued his way until, at last, he was once more at his post. This time, though, he flung himself down full length on his platform to look through his field-glasses at the horizon. The changes he now saw were that the enemy columns were advancing, in close rank, behind the isolated farms and behind the mills. In the foreground, sharp-shooters were gliding and crawling towards the asparagus fields. Hundreds of men were already hidden there. He felt sure of that.

The Commander was furious. He remembered a certain shooting-party, when he had had a magnificent animal within his range and it had made straight for his neighbour's vicinity, thus preventing him from shooting, for fear of hitting his fellow huntsman.

It was certainly his fate to play the part of Tantalus. He wondered why the telephonists did not arrive, and whether the poor wretches had been shot down? Finally, he caught sight of them crossing the railroad, five hundred yards away. He hoped they would stoop down, and crawl if necessary, for the balls were whizzing along all the time. In the meantime, the Commander took his measures, noted the distances on the map, and revelled in advance at the thought of massacring the most odious enemies that ever existed, and cutting short their triumph in this sudden attack, which they fancied they were carrying out so well. The minutes seemed endlessly long; his blood was boiling and beating in his heart and brain. . . .

Finally, the telephonists were at the foot of the ladder, the communication was once more set up and the first command sent like lightning. A few seconds passed, and the reply was there. Four rapid shrapnels burst above the asparagus, just at the right height, and now, quick, quick, and rapid firing!

The storm continued pouring down on the fields where the Boches were crouching and, through his field-glasses, the Commander could see hideous things flying in the air: arms, legs, and helmeted heads. At the same time as his orders, the telephone communicated to the battery the result of the firing, and the gunners imagined that they saw with their eyes the magnificent work of death. This excited them and, in glee, they continued their work with enthusiasm and speed.

After the asparagus fields, they attacked the farms. The shells fell there like thunderbolts and fires broke out everywhere. In spite of all this, the balls continued to whizz round the observatory. It was very evident that there were some men hidden who were shooting desperately. The Commander searched everywhere and concluded that they were in the one house still standing, the one house that the engineers had not destroyed. It was situated on the road from Breendonck to Lippeloo and within the last two hours it had been suddenly loop-holed. What was to be done? It was too small a building to constitute an objective for indirect aim, and consequently it would have been useless to inform the battery. The Breendonck Fort, though, could knock it down directly.

It was the telephonist who thought of this and suggested his idea to the Commander, who had been obliged to come down once more from his perch, as it

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was impossible to remain there. The idea was good, but the question was how to communicate with the Fort? It was more than eight hundred yards away, and there was almost entirely open ground between them. The telephonist started off on his own account and, less than ten minutes later, the Fort opened fire on the house. With the third shell, it was flaming like a huge torch, after which it fell, sending an immense bouquet of sparks up into the air. . . . The Commander once more went back to his observation post, but the fête was over.

The roads were deserted; the asparagus plants on which he turned his glasses were quite still; the farms were smoking and the rumbling of the cannon could only be heard dying away in the distance. Over yonder, beyond the village of Breendonck, the disorderly retreat of the Boches could be imagined, saving their cannons, dragging along their wounded, and hastening to hide their disgrace.

After that our reconnaissances and our ambulances came out, and the sad and glorious balance sheet of the day's work was gradually made out.

The next day we found that, in the asparagus fields, 1100 German identification plaques had been gathered.

The Commander, whom everyone was congratulating, grasped the hands of the two soldier-telephonists and said to them: "And all this, thanks to you, my brave fellows!"

CHAPTER XIV

The Re-Taking of Aerschot

BY SUB-LIEUTENANT CH. DENDALE OF THE 7TH LINE REGIMENT

On the 7th and 8th of September, the diminution of the forces besieging Antwerp was known at Headquarters and a *sortie*, with all the troops of the fighting army, was decided upon, either to inflict a defeat on the enemy, or to oblige the Germans to bring back, towards Antwerp, some of the forces now on the way to France. The *sortie* commenced on the 9th of September and began favourably.

On the 9th, the passages of the Démer and of the Dyle were conquered and Aerschot was taken. On the 10th, a platoon of the 2nd Mounted Chasseurs entered Louvain, but the 2nd Division was stopped at Wygmael and at Putkapel. The enemy brought back the 6th Division of Reservists who were then marching to France. On the 11th, the 3rd Division succeeded in an offensive on Over de Vaart and the 6th Division reached the railway from Malines to Louvain. On the 12th, it was the enemy's turn to take the offensive and drive back the 2nd Division at Rotselaer and Wesemael. This retreat drew with it the 6th Division and then the 3rd Division, and on the 13th the army fell back towards the retrenched camp. The chief object was nevertheless attained. The adversary had been obliged, not only to bring back to the Belgian front the 6th Division of the 3rd Corps, but also to delay the march of the 9th Corps towards France for two days, at the precise moment when the German armies, in effecting their retreat on the Marne, had the most urgent need of reinforcements.

THIS is not an account of a particularly glorious feat of arms, but merely a statement of impressions during

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a combat which, although it was less murderous than any other in which I took part, left the most vivid impression on my mind.

During the second *sortie* from Antwerp, the 27th Regiment, which landed at Heyst-op-den-Berg during the night of the 8th and 9th of September, received as its first objective: Aerschot. All along our road we could see the ruins of the dwellings which had been destroyed by fire by the Germans. These ruins stood out clearly and lamentably against the blue sky. From the *débris*, which were still smoking, a special, bitter odour emanated, which choked and suffocated us, giving us an indescribable sensation. We did not dare stir the ashes, for fear of exposing to view the calcinated remains of the martyrs who had been burned, with all they possessed, on the bit of land where they had been born, and where they had grown up, struggled, suffered, and where, with visions of horror before their eyes, they had died.

We approached the town and the Boches had not yet shown any signs of life. Suddenly, my attention was drawn to a forage cap, the red band of which stood out in contrast against the green of the meadow. I rushed forward and then stood still, deeply moved. The cap was attached to a little cross, made of branches, planted on a small mound. This first vision of the anonymous grave of a brave man, who had died for the sake of his country, gave me a pang at my heart. Alas, how many such tombs I have seen since then! I stood there thinking, and my thoughts went from the hero, who had fallen in the midst of life and light, to the poor old parents who were trembling for their son, to the poor parents who would never know where their lad had been buried.

We entered the town after the vanguard, which did not meet with any serious resistance. There were no longer ruins just here and there, but heaps and heaps of them everywhere. Nothing had escaped the destructive rage of the invader. Everything which had not been consumed by the flames had been saccaged. The shop windows had been cleared, furniture destroyed, glasses smashed, clothes thrown about in lamentable heaps. It must have taken whole days to destroy all these things, with kicks of heavy boots and with the butt end of guns. And what amazed us was the number of empty bottles strewing the ground. There must have been "colossal" drinking bouts. Perhaps the soldiers, in order to carry out their cruel task, had lacked courage. Perhaps at the bottom of their hearts, some sentiments of honour and of probity had been stirred, and they had had to stifle all this by drinking until they had lost their reason.

Gradually, a little curiosity mingled with our emotion. Silently, and with heavy hearts, we visited these ruins, exhaustless and glorious relics of patriotic love and virtue. Everything here, from the tombs down to the very stones, proved that Belgians prefer death to cowardly submission, prefer to suffer rather than to betray their word of honour. An atmosphere of august sacrifice sanctified this spot.

Suddenly, I uttered a cry. Over yonder, on the front of a convent, a big German flag was floating insolently in the wind. I rushed forward, but the soldiers had already preceded me, and the Colonel stamped on the accursed emblem. Our eyes shone with joy and hope. This sight was a symbol to us. We saw in it German power laid low, Right triumphant,

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Belgium delivered, and we were filled with absolute confidence. . . .

Piff! paff! There was fighting going on over yonder and these detonations exasperated us. We rushed forward spontaneously in a wild, disorderly chase, crying out: "Long live the King!"

The Boches occupied the heights at the other side of the town. They greeted our vanguard with a violent firing, but fortunately it was badly aimed. Our Battalion rushed to the rescue. Just as we were turning the corner of a street and entering the zone swept by the firing, the first ranks hesitated for an instant. Then, and never shall I forget that sight, the standard-bearer rushed forward, holding our flag high with its three colours unfurled.

Electrified, the men rushed like a whirlwind, the clarions sounded the assault, and a confused clamour rang out: "Hurrah, Hurrah for Belgium!" The irresistible stream of our troopers gained the heights. The men were mad with fury, for the sight of the German atrocities had exasperated them. They hurried on, their hearts overflowing with rage.

"No prisoners! No quarter! Death to the bandits!"

Curses rang out on all sides. The men's faces were hard, savage, pitiless.

"They shall be cared for, their wounded!" I heard someone say.

I turned round and saw our doctor. The expression of his eyes scared me. A veritable flame of hatred had been lighted in all hearts.

"Yes, we are ready for anything. No pity! No conventions. So much the worse for them. They have brought it on themselves! It is their punishment!"

An immense joy took possession of us and transported us, the joy of the idea of snatching from the invader a shred of our national territory.

A pitiful troop of German prisoners was halting on the road. The sun was scorching. Our men, streaming with perspiration, grouped themselves round them, looking at them curiously. What did I now see, though? Was it possible? The same soldiers who had been intoxicated with the madness of carnage, with vengeance and hate, were now looking after these captives. One offered them cigarettes, another one coffee from his flask. Our "ferocious" doctor was busy lavishing his care on them, and dressing their wounds down to the very least scratch.

Suddenly calm again, on seeing the suffering of others, we were once more kind-hearted, simple Belgians, hospitable and compassionate, according to the traditions of our race. Moved by pity, we were doing our best to relieve the sufferings of our wounded enemies. I looked on at this poignant scene thoughtfully, and I was seized with deep emotion. My eyes were dim with tears and my heart swelled with joy, with unutterable pride, the joy and the pride of being a Belgian.

HOTEL DIEU, ALBERT I. HOSPITAL. 9. 11. 15.

CHAPTER XV

A Fine Capture

BY STAFF DEPUTY CAPTAIN COURBOIN

September 9, 1914. Aerschot, devastated and pillaged by the Germans, was retaken by Belgian troops composed of the Cavalry Division and the 7th Brigade. Surprised by the rapid action of our men, the enemy occupants made off, like a band of sparrows, in the direction of Louvain. To the south of the town, though, some detachments, probably unaware of the direction of the retreat, were still holding out. Our troops had gathered together on the heights towards Nieuw-Rhode and were awaiting orders. I had left my unit and was walking along at the border of the St. Hertoger Heyde Bosch, when a soldier of the 27th Line Regiment told me that, according to a patrol, a horseman of the 2nd Guides was lying wounded on the road running through the forest.

I asked for a gun and some cartridges and proposed to an army chaplain that he should accompany me. Twenty soldiers at once volunteered their services and I had the greatest difficulty in limiting my escort to a Corporal and six men.

Ten minutes later, the horseman, who was unfortunately dead, was brought into our lines. My men had to encounter a violent firing, which came from the border of the wood to the south, proving

that there was at least one enemy company there. The horrors they had seen at Aerschot had roused the anger of our men, and they beseeched me to return to the forest with a force and avenge our unfortunate compatriots. I could not possibly have yielded to their entreaties, if an unforeseen circumstance had not more or less justified our escapade. An auto-machine-gun of the 1st Division of Cavalry, which was to reconnoitre in the direction of Nieuw-Rhode asked for an escort of scouts. I offered the help of our little troop and, a few minutes later, we were once more exploring the St. Hertoger Heyde. The woods appeared to be deserted, but, on arriving near the southern border, an intense firing, from the Nieuw-Rhode summit, greeted us. Our machine-guns replied with interest, whilst my men searched the houses skirting the road, one after another, and, hiding behind the hedges, were ready to take aim at any German heads which, in a moment of imprudence, should be outlined against the deep blue of the horizon.

We bounded on until we were within a hundred yards from the summit. The enemy firing had ceased and we now saw about fifteen wounded men sheltering in a ditch and imploring our aid. We wondered whether this could be a trap for us? It was too late, though, for prudence. We had risked coming two miles into the enemy's lines and my men were there, quivering with impatience. It was no use hesitating. Four houses stood in the corners of the cross-roads here, and these were probably sheltering the wounded and those who were trying to escape. There was no window looking out on to the place where we stood; the gardens appeared to be empty;

one more rush and we should be able to see what was going on beyond the summit. When once we were at the top, I had no time to deliberate. A horseman, who, I must own, appeared to have lost control of his mount, galloped towards me at full speed. I shouldered my gun and . . . the Boche bit the dust. The terrified horse leaped about in the fields; my men took aim and the machine-gun seemed to start firing on its own accord. That moment of over-excitement saved us.

The enemy thought we were there in strong force. A gun, covered with a white handkerchief, appeared at a skylight window. They were surrendering. I placed myself against the wall of the house, so that I might escape any treacherous firing from the window in the roof.

"Throw the guns out!" I shouted. A gun fell on the ground at our feet, then another and another. My men were wild with delight.

"Twenty . . . fifty . . . a hundred," they counted. When the hundred and sixth gun fell to the ground, there was a lull and a German sub-officer then, came out to make terms with us. In very good French, he asked that the lives of the Lieutenant, five sub-officers, and one hundred and six men, concealed in the house, might be spared.

Two minutes later, a little troop of men arrayed in iron-grey and blue, were standing in line on the road. A very Prussian little Lieutenant handed me his pistol, which joined the guns piled up in the ditch. My men did not seem to be at all aware of the strangeness, which was really somewhat alarming, of our situation. If only our prisoners had had a little energy, the rôles might have been reversed. I would not allow myself an instant even to think of this and I gave the order to my Boche colleague to take the command of his men.

With incontestable authority, tapping his high boots with a little stick, the Lieutenant commanded in a very arrogant tone: "Attention!" I wondered again whether, in reply to one of his injunctions, given in a guttural tone in the German language, the whole band would not suddenly fall upon us and, instinctively, I tightened my hold on the butt end of my Mauser. . . .

No, it was very evident that these soldiers had a special mentality. The little dandy, tightly buttoned up in his grey coat, marching at the head of his men, seemed to me absolutely repugnant. I knew that our soldiers, commanded by one of our brave comrades, would not have remained long in the situation of this band of cowards. There they were, outnumbering us ridiculously, escorted by seven Belgian soldiers, marching to our Headquarters at Aerschot. Prisoners! They were prisoners and . . . happy!

I was just about to fall in and close the march of this column, after promising to send help to the wounded, who were groaning in the ditch and calling out all the time: "A doctor. A doctor!" when a big, rough hand seized mine and shook it unceremoniously. It was Corporal Dethier, of the 27th, a brave miner of Liège.

"Captain," he whispered, "we all thank you. As for me, I am very glad, for I feel that I have been a good soldier to-day."¹

¹ The names of these six brave men are: Massin, Cyclist Company; De Sutter, 3/2; Menu, 3/2; Le Kouttre, 3/2 of the 7th Line Regiment; Barthels and Sty, Cyclist Carabineers of the 1st Cavalry Division, who were both proposed later on for honorary distinction; Corporal J. J. Dethier, who was wounded at the Yser and had his leg amputated. He has been made a Knight of the Order of Leopold.

CHAPTER XVI

(September 9-12, 1914)

The Second Sortie from Antwerp

EPISODE OF THE BATTLE BEFORE OVER-DE-VAERT (HAECHT).
BY LIEUTENANT L. CHARDOME OF THE 14TH LINE REGIMENT

I AM writing the account of this combat in bed, at the Elisabeth Ambulance, as I am still suffering from my wounds of thirteen months ago. I give this account without any pretension and without any false modesty; my only care being to tell the exact truth.

It was during the second *sortie* of the Antwerp garrison. My Company, the 2nd Division of Hotchkiss machine-guns of the 3rd Army Division, had passed the night of September 11 and 12, 1914, along the embankment of the Malines-Louvain railway line, five hundred yards from the Haecht-Wespeleare station. At 4 in the morning, we received orders to get into line and go to the support of the 14th Line Regiment; my men mounted the slope in glee, and had soon cleared the summit. Very soon the two guns of my Section, the 52nd and 53rd, had taken their place with the sharp-shooters of Commander Magnette's Company, supporting the last Section of Infantry to the extreme left.

The sharp-shooters during the night had occupied

a trench intended for those who kneel and they were now busy making it deeper. To my right, I could see their outlines dimly through the morning mist. In the rear the 15 Howitzers, placed beyond the railway, had sounded the reveille and immediately, three 75 batteries of the 12th Brigade took up the firing on the left. Towards 8 o'clock, the mist had entirely disappeared and the battle-field could be seen. Our losses were already important. First Sergeant-Major Carlens, Chief of the Machine-gun Section, had been killed and Butjens, who served the 52nd, had been shot through his thigh. I had reserved the 52nd for myself and I was pointing it. From time to time, I called out to the men who were firing haphazard: "What are you aiming at? Do not shoot till you see the enemy." In order to give them confidence, however, I sent off about thirty cartridges, now and then, towards spots that I believed were occupied, as I know how it comforts the soldier to feel that he is being supported by the machine-gun.

In front of us, the firing continued, and the German Maxims never ceased for an instant their ta-ra-ta-rata. The question was, Where did this firing come from? It was not until ten o'clock that I finally caught sight of the enemy trenches. For six hours, until then, I had been searching the firing range with excellent field-glasses, and had not been able to discover anything. Suddenly, a German head emerged and revealed to me the whole position.

"Caught!" I said to myself and I felt the most ferocious joy. I could now direct my firing, and Hubert Massart, my orderly, served me as observer. I succeeded, with three strips of thirty cartridges, in hitting straight at the parapet and the talus. I at

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once communicated my discovery to the Infantry and to my 53rd and, from that moment, our firing was more intense, although intermittent.

The morning passed by without any special incident and I took advantage of this for examining our position. In front of us was a glacis something like that of St. Privat, but ten times more dangerous, considering the power of firearms at present. It was a horse-shoe of fire, skirted with long, low houses, and these were now full of invisible and almost invulnerable defenders. The background consisted of two German trenches, separated by a white house with walls of cracked bricks, which served as a shelter for legions of Boches. The whole of the morning, the 75 cannons and the 15 Howitzers were directed on these houses, which, we were told, were occupied by picked shooters or by machine-guns. Our gunners aimed with wonderful precision, but the shells went through the first wall, burst in the first room, and left the others intact. One out of three of our projectiles set fire to something, which was distinctly better for us.

I was installed behind the first obstacle of a deserted German trench, slightly outside and in front of our line, which I could flank, if necessary, whilst meeting a flank attack. To my left there was a gap opposite the Artillery, but on this side no foot-soldier could be seen.

At mid-day, our brave men suddenly cleared the parapet of their trench and advanced, crawling along and firing all the time. The line at once supported them, slightly to the right, and this freed my two machine-guns. We advanced, in our turn, within the fiery circle, from which we could only come out dead or conquerors.

I decided to leave the 53rd to continue the firing and flank the attack, whilst, making use of the empty Boche trench, I could go forward with the 52nd and support the Infantry.

"Bring the gun," I said to Sergeant Maréchal; "close the cartridge boxes and follow me."

I then set off to reconnoitre the road along which we had to go and the place to occupy for the firing. I had only to follow the German trench, about two hundred yards long, the end of which I was holding. When I came to the other end of this, I saw that the Infantry was advancing at a prodigious rate, under an extremely violent fire of musketry and machine-guns. To my right, in front of me just beyond a cross-road, was a second Boche trench which, curiously enough, I had not seen. I cleared the twenty-five yards which separated me from the cross-road. I then went along the ditch and, with a jump, reached the second trench. I went quickly right to the end of it and found that this formed a sort of hook, and that it would be a good position for the firing. I went quickly back to fetch my men and found they had already reached the cross-road. Unfortunately it was not possible to free the gun from the trivet of the Hotchkiss and, on account of the narrowness of the passage, we had great difficulty in transporting it. We made use of the ditch along the road, and then slipped into the second German trench. To the right, half way along, I caught sight of Corporal Boreux, of the 14th, out in the open field. He was dragging himself along with his legs bleeding.

"Can I have my wounds dressed, Lieutenant?" he called out.

"Quite impossible, my poor fellow!" I replied.

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"Get down into the ditch, and as soon as the fight is over, you shall be seen to."

The brave foot-soldiers were already at the end of the second Boche trench when I arrived and installed my gun.

"Lieutenant," said Maréchal, "there is a machine-gun firing on us."

He was quite right for, from the right of the little house opposite us, a German gun was sending us its messages. I pointed immediately, at a distance of two hundred yards, and silenced it with the first volley. Its rôle was over. I then began to pepper the Boche trenches, to the right and left of the little house. My gun worked excellently well and my men were absolutely calm. The brave fellows of the 14th soon passed by and went farther on. In less than a quarter of an hour they had cleared four hundred and fifty yards. The line continued to support them.

"Maréchal," I said, "I am going to entrust you with a confidential mission. Go and fetch the 53rd and bring it here."

I continued firing, thus neutralising the trench to the right. Our Artillery was obliged to stop firing on that side, but it peppered the left part and hit the walls and the houses on the main road from Louvain to Malines with its shrapnels.

The Germans had no artillery, which was extremely fortunate for us. My 53rd did not arrive though, and I had decided that, as soon as it came to relieve me, I would go forward and join the left wing of my regiment, in order to give these brave fellows, at any cost, the comfort of the presence of a machine-gun. I wanted to be with them to the end. Fearing to arrive too late, I decided to start.

"Come along, boys," I said, "the moment has come for the final blow. Forward!"

I seized the right foot of my gun, Massart the left one.

Janssens gave a hand, and Fraikin and Collard carried the cartridge cases. With a great effort, we got out of our shelter into the open field. It was more than imprudence, it was almost foolhardiness. My shooting had proved to be very superior to the adversary's though, and the brilliant attack had made me so hopeful. We went along about ten yards, surrounded by a swarm of balls. The German trenches had recommenced firing right and left. At a distance of three hundred yards, their picked shots and their machine-guns were aiming at us. Suddenly Massart fell, stifling a cry of pain. We all flung ourselves down on the ground. The well-known "kiss, kiss," was whistling through the air.

"Who is hit?" I asked. "Is it you, Hubert?"

"Yes, in the arm, Lieutenant."

The other men crawled down into the trenches we had just left.

"Lieutenant, could I have my arm seen to?" asked Hubert.

"Who is to do it?" I said. "Vile Boches! I will pay them for it. Get close to the trench, put your head against the parapet, and do not stir from there."

The "kiss, kiss" had ceased, for we were supposed to be all dead, and there were other objectives. I got up and once more began firing, but I was alone now in the midst of the fiery circle. My cousin, Lieutenant Fernand Marissal, who had brought his guns to my right, had stopped firing for the only reason possible. He had just been killed. Some Boches,

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hiding in a house had sent him a ball in the head. The sharp-shooters no longer existed, the brave Commander Magnette had been killed at the head of them. I therefore had to face three sides. I commenced by imposing silence once more on the trench to the left, and a ball grazed my right cheek and nose. It was a violent shock and my face was all bleeding, but, fortunately, my eyes were spared. I continued shooting at the houses on the right and I peppered doors, windows, and roofs. After this I aimed at the trench, which fired back at me. I was hit in the right fore-arm. A vein was cut, and this meant a considerable hemorrhage. I turned up the sleeve of my sweater and found my shirt quite red; my fingers still worked, but with difficulty. I meant to make the men in hiding, on the main road, pay for this. My poor Hubert had dragged himself along to the first trench and he said to his comrades, who were now shooting with guns: "What, do you mean to say that the Lieutenant is left alone to do the firing? He has been wounded twice. Is there no one to help him?" These were his last words. Mortally wounded as he was, this hero used his last breath to exhort his comrades to do their duty.

Janssens came out of the trench and charged my machine. I was just going to fire, when I was hit on the knee and brought to the ground.

"They have broken my leg!" I said. It certainly was in a strange position, and I pulled it round and stretched it out in front of me. I fired the last strip of cartridges loaded, and all those in the box near me. It was all I could do. Janssens had returned to the trench. I took off my right spur, which was twisting my broken leg, and lay down on my back, with my

head on my shako, and a map on my face to protect me from the heat of the sun. It was 12.30. The sky was extremely limpid, with whitish clouds here and there. From time to time, the crows flew slowly by, uttering their hoarse croak.

"What are your orders, Lieutenant?" suddenly said a voice near me.

It was the brave Maréchal, accompanied by Corporal Treize and Private Van Herck of the 53rd.

"What about the 53rd?" I asked.

"It won't work, Lieutenant."

"Where is it?"

"We have put it completely out of use."

"Is there nothing more to be done then?"

"Yes, we are going to move you from here, Lieutenant."

"No, my boys," I said, "during action, the wounded cannot be moved." I could not, of course, accept for myself what I had refused twice for my men.

"Put the gun out of use," I said.

"We are going to save it, Lieutenant."

Taking advantage of a lull, he and the other two seized the gun and managed to drag it into the trench. This was a joy to me. The assault had failed. The first line had been massacred and those supporting it had stopped firing. Behind us and to the right, the Darche Company, of the 14th, now occupied the cross-road, where my poor cousin's two guns had been once more brought into action. Farther on, and to the left, the Moreau Company was defending Magnette's trench. The balls of this Company, as well as those of the enemy, passed over my head. Before going away with my 52nd, the good fellows begged affectionately to take me away. I refused

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categorically, for, as an officer, I wished to share the same fate as the brave soldiers who had fallen during the attack. I put an eighth cartridge into my Browning, determined to defend myself to the end. Presently, I heard the breathing of my poor Hubert Massart develop into the death rattle. A significant crispation of the spine caused his chest to swell, his nostrils were ominously drawn. I was present at his death and could do nothing.

As to myself, I was happy and very proud. My blood was flowing freely and I had nothing with which to staunch the wound. Fortunately, my tight breeches and my putties served as a sort of harness and, as vigorously as my injured hand allowed me, I fastened the strap of my field-glasses round my thigh.

The combat continued intermittently. At 5.30, a few Boche shells were still falling here and there, within the firing range. One of them buried itself a few yards away from me and the soil thrown up by the explosion half covered me. I determined to try and rejoin the Darche Company and began to drag myself along on my back, with the help of my one leg and my elbows, leaving behind me a line of blood. From time to time, I lifted my arm to show my rank to friends, and I heard them cry out distinctly:

"Take care, take care, the Lieutenant!"

Towards 6.30 I reached the cross-road and, by a miracle, I managed to clear the first ditch. One of the sharp-shooters took me by the shoulders when I arrived at the second one. He dragged me the whole length of the ditch to the left of his Company. Corporal Boreux and other wounded men were there and we were then in safety.

CHAPTER XVII

The 1st Regiment of Lancers

BY STAFF DEPUTY COLONEL E. JOOSTENS

The operations of the Siege of Antwerp commenced on the 28th of September. The enemy bombarded the Forts, the resistance of which was compromised by the firing of cannon of 42 cm. At the same time the enemy endeavoured to force the Escaut, between Termonde and Ghent, with the idea of cutting off the retreat of the Belgian army. The river was defended by the 4th Army Division, which was posted chiefly in the vicinity of Termonde. The 1st Lancers were at the extreme right of the Division. More to the west, towards Wetteren, the 1st Division of Cavalry was spread along the whole left bank of the Dendre.

THE organisation of the Belgian army, when at war, requires a cavalry regiment for every division. Thanks to the hazards of this campaign, only the 1st and 3rd Lancers remained permanently with the big units to which they were organically attached.

Whilst the greater part of the men with our arm expected to keep their spurs, which are worn very high, and were preparing their flourish of trumpets, the 1st Lancers, that is the mounted ones, could not have the same pretensions, as they were destined to share the fate of the 4th Army Division during nearly all the operations. There was plenty of good work to be done, nevertheless, and from the very commence-

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ment, both on the banks of the Meuse and around Namur, our bold reconnaissances proved the value of this arm. In the northern Sector, Deputy Staff Major Lenercier, at present a brilliant Colonel of the 5th Lancers, took the direction of the combats of Boneffe and of the Sauvenière Mill. To the south, our regretted comrade, Lieutenant Moreau, made a most daring reconnaissance. At the head of two platoons, he went as far as Ciney, which was full of Germans. On his return, his little troop was completely surrounded, but the Lieutenant was not to be intimidated. He assailed his adversary and, thanks to his own personal intervention, he saved the life, or at least the liberty, of one of his comrades, who was surrounded by Uhlans, just as they were preparing to do him an evil turn.

The spirit of our mounted Lancers is admirable. How many of them have given proof of individual prowess! I well remember, among a hundred instances, that of the gay trumpeter, who had specialised in hunting the Boches. He would start off alone on his hunt, and he was very much cast down if he did not account for two or three in his day's work. Sometimes he would account for about ten of them, and his eyes were brighter than usual on those days.

The evacuation of Namur took place on the 23rd of August, and was a difficult and sorrowful retreat. The march was long, the horses exhausted, the temperature very high, and the Uhlans sometimes very near indeed, but what did all that matter? We had to rejoin our fellow-soldiers with the fighting army. And after various incidents we reached Coulommiers and La Ferté. From there we went to Havre, and had a few days of peaceful life, in the midst of a

population whose hospitable welcome has left grateful memories in our Belgian hearts. Four steamers then took us back to our own country. We had time to re-equip ourselves and, after a few days at Contich, we took part in the operations around the retrenched camp. There were reconnaissances to be carried out to the north of Malines, and in the direction of Louvain, Lippelloo, etc. Our officers kept surpassing each other in activity and daring, and the men were as brave as their chiefs.

At the beginning of October, the besiegers commenced the general attack of the position organised on the north bank of the Nèthe. At the same time, they made some attempts to force the passage of the Escaut at Baesrode, Termonde, and Schoonaerde. The 4th Army Division and the 1st Cavalry Division stopped them. The rôle of the 1st Lancers, at that time, was to send out reconnaissances beyond Termonde, to Gyseghem and Audeghem and then, when the enemy was too insistent, to ensure the guarding of the Escaut and, if necessary, the defence of the river between Dyck and Schoonaerde.

Towards the 4th of October, the situation became rather critical. The following is an extract from an account given by Captain Commander Cartuyvels de Collaert, who depicts the situation faithfully as far as his Squadron was concerned. The others had experiences just as critical.

"A Company of Infantry in the first line," he says, "and my Squadron in the second line were to prevent the Boches from passing the bridge, which had been partially destroyed, at Schoonaerde.

"In the afternoon of the 4th of October, there was

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violent firing from the enemy. I evacuated the horses quickly. Part of the little hamlet of Dael, to the south of Berlaere, where the horses then were, was literally shattered.

"During the bombardment, Staff Deputy Colonel Joostens, who was then Major, arrived at Berlaere on his way to the Schoonaerde bridge. I was stopped by the shells at the last houses, to the south of Dael, and had just time to fling myself into a ditch two yards to the east of the road, in front of a farm which received four or five projectiles. A little while after this, Staff Commander Adjutant Major Yperman hastened up to me.

"'Where is the Major?' he asked.

"'There,' I answered, pointing to the Escaut. Just at this moment, an artillery salvo saluted his arrival. Honour be to whom honour is due!

"'I fancy you want me to be killed,' said Commander Yperman, laughing.

"To my right, on the other side of the road, was a cultivated field, and then a little farm surrounded by hedges. I saw a firing effect there that seemed extraordinary. The shells were raining down. Suddenly, a ball of fire, which looked about three or four yards in diameter, came along quickly, parallel with the road in the direction of the little farm, but close to the ground. It cleared the hedge, scarcely touching it, just as a horse might have done at a hunt. It was a very pretty sight!

"We had no losses that day, but alas, it was a very different thing the day following. Towards evening, I received orders to fall back and occupy, with my Squadron, the south border of Berlaere.

"Lieutenant Roup was hit in the leg by shrapnel,

but was not seriously wounded. At night, a fresh communication arrived. My brave Lancers were to go into the trenches that I had been to inspect near the Schoonaerde bridge. The Boches were on the other side of the river.

"The following morning, the 5th of October, we were to be four or five hundred yards to the east of the bridge, in order to let our Artillery shoot over Schoonaerde. Just at this point, the Escaut makes a slight concave bend towards the north, that is on our side. I was, therefore, afraid of two things. First, there was the danger that the Germans, covered by their own Artillery, might cross the bridge without our seeing them, as we were rather far from it ourselves. Then I feared that we might be surprised from behind, on account of the turn in the Escaut, as Boche sentinels were visible on a sort of cupola, at the top of a German manufactory near the Schoonaerde station, a manufactory which we had not been allowed to destroy by fire the week before. Towards 6.30, I went to the bridge, after telling my men to hide in the small trenches we had made during the night in the embankment of the Escaut. On arriving as far as the church, I heard the roar of cannon. I had a pang at my heart, dreading lest the target should be my poor Squadron. Two minutes later, a formidable storm burst over our wretched little trenches, and this storm continued for half an hour.

"'Not a single man will be left,' I said to myself, as the projectiles passed, one after another, twenty yards in front of me, with an infernal noise. The whizzing of the shrapnels and the roar of the shells were frightful. The air seemed to be torn by them and the commotion was terrible."

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The following is an episode of what took place in the trenches, according to a letter from Lieutenant de Burlet, which I received a few days later.

"At Schoonaerde, I lost seven men of my platoon. One of them was a sub-officer and another my poor orderly, whom you saw by me in the trench. A shrapnel burst two yards away from us, taking off my poor Tuitinier's face. I took refuge under his dead body from 6.30 to 7.45 when, after escaping a thousand dangers and feeling all the revulsions of the body which was protecting me, each time it was hit by the splinters from the shells, I beat a retreat on hearing your whistle."

"At about 7.30," continues Commander Cartuyvels, "the firing ceased. I left my shelter and heard German being spoken on the other side of the water. Piff! paff! . . . A ball had hit me in the chest, but by a miracle had been turned aside by a pocket-knife. A second hit me in the left knee.

"I had received instructions to remain as long as I thought it possible. Considering that the position could no longer be held, I gave orders to my Squadron to beat a retreat. I tried to start as well as I could on all threes, as I could not use my fourth member. I got into a ditch, which was full of water, and then into a second one. I was up to my neck in water and I then dragged myself along on the wet grass. Another ball broke my right thigh, near the hip. I was settled now and I pretended to be dead, but, in spite of this, these 'cultivated creatures' continued firing on me. What a mental retrospection one has time for when one has to stay for twelve or thirteen hours under the enemy's balls!

"I wrote on my cuffs to my wife and to my mother, bidding them farewell, and I lay there waiting for death! The shells continued to rage over my head and the bullets to whizz through the air. A foot-soldier, crawling along a few yards away from me, was shot through the head. He uttered a hoarse cry and his soul passed away.

"In the afternoon, I either had a dum-dum ball or one that had been turned aside in my left thigh, and this caused me great suffering.

"When the darkness came on, thanks to a little whistle which I always used for giving orders, I was found by Quartermaster de Looz-Corswarem and Thibaut of my Squadron. They were helped by a civilian and by a private belonging to the Infantry, whose name I believe was Ledent, and I was put on to a wheelbarrow and taken to Dael. I was saved! ✓

"Under the direction of Dr. Godenne, de Looz and Thibaut brought in several other wounded men. They have since received a military decoration for their fine work. Seventeen men were killed or reported missing that day, and seven were wounded and taken to the hospital. Out of three officers engaged in the combat, two were seriously wounded, and one escaped by using the body of his orderly as a shield. The 4th Squadron had proved itself worthy of its country!

"Things were no better on the 6th. The reserve Squadrons intervened in their turn and held out wonderfully. Nothing whatever disturbed their equanimity. What brave men they were! They were told that if the enemy attempted to come to close quarters, they could defend themselves with the butt end of their guns, as they had no bayonets. They

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accepted this perspective with *sang-froid* and with that decision which had always been their characteristic.

"Lieutenant-General Michel sent them his warmest congratulations on the following day. I transmitted the same to my troop in the following words:

"'After the combats in the neighbourhood of Schoonaerde and Appels, the Lieutenant-General in command of the 4th Army Division has begged me to convey his warmest congratulations to all the officers, sub-officers, brigadiers, and men of the regiment who, for several consecutive days, carried out an extremely difficult and exposed service in the trenches. The exceptionally firm and resolute conduct of the 1st Regiment of Lancers has won the admiration of Lieutenant-General Michel and I am proud and happy to transmit to all those who have merited it the testimony of his great satisfaction. We shall none of us ever forget those of our comrades who fell during these cruel days, nor any of those whom we have lost since the beginning of the campaign, and our courage and activity will be greater than ever now, in order to avenge and honour their memory.'"

The retreat led us in the direction of the Yser, and we were frequently in close contact with the enemy's Cavalry at Thourout, Moerbeke, Vladsloo, and Bovekerque, and finally, after the great battle, the Squadrons, giving up for the time their spurs, mingled during long months with the foot-soldiers, in order to share with them in the work of organising and defending the trenches.

The King considered that the 1st Regiment of Lancers had specially distinguished itself at Schoonaerde, at Selzaete, and before Dixmude, and rewarded

a number of my brave officers by granting to them the following distinctions:

Colonel A. E. M. Joostens, Major A. E. M. Lemerrier, Captain Commander Cartuyvels: Officers of the Order of Leopold.

Major A. E. M. Yperman, Captain Commander Ch. de Mélotte: Knights of the Legion of Honour.

Captain Commander de Thier, Rosseels: Knights of the Order of Leopold.

Lieutenants Pulinx, Delfosse, Deboek, Laffineur, Orban: Knights of the Order of Leopold.

Sub-Lieutenants Dugardin, Cartuyvels de Collaert, Ch. de Mélotte: Knights of the Order of Leopold.

Drs. Brasseur, Hallez, Godenne: Knights of the Order of Leopold.

Lieutenants Moreau, de Kerchove, de Denterghem: Knights of the Order of Leopold and a citation in the minutes of the Army.

Lieutenant Rolin: Knight of the Order of Leopold and a decoration of the Order of St. Anne (3rd class).

Lieutenant Bertrand: Knight of the Order of the Crown.


Commander Bosquet: A citation in the minutes of the Army.

Army Doctor Evrard. A citation in the minutes of the Army.

Lieutenants Verhaegen, Roup, Fichet, Count d'Ursel (Georges): A citation in the minutes of the Army.

Sub-Lieutenant Baron Sloet van Oldruytenborg: A citation in the minutes of the Army.

It would take too long to enumerate the rewards of the lower ranks and of the cavalymen, but I



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would not finish this brief account without expressing to them my admiration and taking off my hat to all of them, whilst repeating the words of a great chief: "I would go down on my knees to them all."

WULFEN, October, 1915.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Termonde Bridge

BY AN OFFICER OF THE 4TH ARTILLERY REGIMENT

ON the 28th of September, 1914, the 1st Group of the 4th Artillery, under Captain Commander T'Serstevens, after distinguishing itself in the combats fought to the south of Termonde, at St. Gilles, at Audeghem and at Wieze, came to Grembergen to take the place of the batteries of the 4th Brigade, which was made up of various units. Of all the positions at Termonde, that of the bridge itself, then occupied by a cannon intended to take it by enfilade, was the most dangerous of any. All the chiefs of the sections of this group had been on service there, turn by turn. Two of them, Sub-Lieutenants Hiernaux and Mayat, were killed there.

Hiernaux fell at his post, the night of the 1st of October, during an attack by the enemy. The Termonde bridge had been destroyed beforehand, and a wooden bridge had been constructed and mined by a section of the Engineers, who were there ready to blow it up. With the 13th Line Regiment, and a machine-gun, we occupied the left bank of the Escaut and the Germans held the town itself, which was built on the opposite bank. The bridge, therefore, constituted a passage common to us both, and the

defensive organisations on both sides were similar and formidable. The banks of the river were merely deep trenches, and the nearest houses served as block-houses for the machine-guns and small cannons. Our look-out men, on the alert all the time, were endeavouring to surprise the enemy's least preparations in the ruins, with which we were already familiar, of the burnt town. The framework of the gaping houses looked, at night, like so many weird skeletons. From time to time, by the light of a moonbeam, we saw figures gliding along between the portions of the walls. Such figures were always promptly saluted by the crackling of a ball and they would then disappear among the ruins. Over yonder, like so many will-o'-the-wisps, little blue flames could be seen at intervals. They were caused by the *élite* of the enemy's picked guns aiming at any heads which appeared above our parapets.

The night of the 1st of October was a beautiful, starry autumn night. The German Artillery, after an excessively violent bombardment, which had lasted several hours and had obliged our much-tried Infantry to leave the dyke and to curve round the other parts of the bridge, now fired less frequently. The soldiers, leaning against their shelters, were enjoying fresh air in relative tranquillity.

A vigilant sentinel suddenly hailed his chief. He had just seen a dark compact mass moving along. It was not very visible by the light of the moon, but it appeared to be making for the bridge.

There was no doubt about it, the enemy was trying to effect a passage. At the signal of alarm, foot-soldiers, machine- and cannon-gunners rushed to their posts, and the storm immediately broke loose.

Under the protection of a violent and continuous firing from the right bank, an assaulting column came out from the principal street of Termonde. The first men were carrying mattresses, which they endeavoured to use as shields; the others followed, in close ranks without any order. They looked more like a flock of animals than a regularly constituted troop. They were singing their famous *Gloria Victoria* and appeared to be absolutely drunk. After the first discharges of musketry, the artillery gun had its men *hors de combat*, with the exception of Sub-Lieutenant Hiernaux and the man in command of the cannon, who both opened fire on the assailants. The machine-gun entered into action as well, whilst the soldiers of the 13th Line Regiment fired direct on the German troops who, nevertheless, managed to get a footing on the bridge.

The officer of the Engineers who had mined it had two discharges. Seeing that the assailants who were killed were instantly replaced by others, and that the enemy was threatening the left bank, this brave man established the electric contact. To our stupefaction, no detonation followed. The Germans had now reached the end of the bridge. Without any excitement, the officer seized the second discharge. A formidable explosion took place, flinging into the distance the ruins of the bridge, fragments of human beings, and various objects of their equipment. All fell *pêle-mêle* into the river and on to the banks, covering the soldiers who were hidden there with blood and with human shreds. In face of this disaster, the assaulting column stopped short, horrified, and then rushed back in disorder towards the town, whilst huge flames rose from the piles of the bridge which had been soaked in petroleum.

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The surprise attack had failed, and two more weak attempts were cut short by our shelling. The usual vengeance was then resorted to. The enemy Artillery concentrated its fire on the vicinity of the bridge. Our brave troops lived through one of those critical moments when the destructive power of the human machine is only comparable to the grandeur of souls ready for any sacrifice. For one long hour, our soldiers were submitted to a storm of steel which, with a hellish clatter, warned them of a fresh attack. It was necessary to conquer the intense nervous strain, to watch without ceasing, and to examine all the impenetrable and threatening fortification works on the other bank of the river. It was whilst examining all this, from above the shield of his cannon, that Sub-Lieutenant Hiernaux fell, just at the critical moment, struck between the eyes by a ball. His fine death proved to us once more all that there is of energy, *sang-froid*, and courage among our subaltern ranks.

Quartermaster Francotte ordered the officer's body to be carried to a neighbouring shelter and he covered it over with a wrap. He then took Hiernaux's place at the cannon and kept his aids there all night, whilst the neighbouring trenches had to be abandoned for a time, as they were impossible, on account of the gas from the explosion of the shells.

Two days later, Sub-Lieutenant Mayat was on service at the bridge. In the afternoon, the Commander of the group and his aid came to examine the adversary's organisation. The heads of the three officers, Sub-Lieutenant Mayat between the other two, were just for an instant above the shield formed by the cannon. This formed an excellent target for

those on the other side. A ball whizzed by and one of the heads disappeared. Mayat, without uttering a cry, fell against his chief, and a stream of red blood spurted from his pierced temple and inundated his face, which had turned suddenly livid.

At present, the two friends are sleeping their glorious sleep side by side, in the little cemetery of Grembergen, where we buried them reverently. The day will come when those who know of their noble death and who, more fortunate than they, have been spared, will be able to go and place flowers on their tombs, in order to show their gratitude and admiration.

But no homage can be equal to the tears of sincere grief of the officer who was sent to take Sub-Lieutenant Mayat's place, when he saw his comrade lying at his post, in all the rigidity of the last sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

The No. 7 Armoured Car

**BY SUB-LIEUTENANT G. THIERY, OF THE 1ST REGIMENT OF
GUIDES, IN COMMAND OF THE GROUP OF ARMoured CARS
OF THE 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION**

WHAT an easy and pleasant task it is to relate the adventures of another person and to praise the exploits and the courage of a friend. But how delicate and trying it is to describe one's own deeds! To the man who considers himself rewarded by the feeling of having done his duty, it is by no means easy to have to say: "I was there and this is what happened to me. . . ." However, since I am requested to give this account, I must do so.

It was at Wommelghem, near Antwerp, that, on the 4th of September, 1914, I was given command of the No. 7 armoured car attached to the Cavalry Division. I will begin by congratulating those who invented and thought out this engine of warfare. Some have been built which were six months in the work-shops. Of these, some are monuments which can never be utilised, and others are wonders invented in offices, which need to be stripped of three quarters of their improvements, in order to be of any use under fire. In three weeks, the Minerva factory and the Cockerill work-shops delivered to the Belgian army

what I believe to be the best armoured car in use. It is sure, easily worked, rapid, strong, and efficiently protected. The No. 7 car brought me a number of brave men. First there was Count Guy de Berlaymont, the personification of courage and indifference to danger; then Constant Heureux, bravery and abnegation made man; finally Dujardin and Gouffaux, two good and valiant soldiers. All of them, like myself, were volunteers.

Without any preliminaries, we found ourselves at once in the midst of the drama.

On the evening of the 5th of September, at the Criterium at Antwerp, Lieutenant Hankar, Count Henri de Villermont, Prince Baudouin de Ligne, Misson, Philippe de Zualar, Berlaymont and I were sitting round a table, discussing our departure joyfully.

On the evening of the 6th, Berlaymont and I were again at the Criterium, and big tears came to our eyes, as we looked at the empty seats which had been occupied, the previous evening, by our friends. That afternoon, whilst patrolling round Herenthals, we heard that their vehicles had been attacked near Zammel. All that we were able to snatch from the enemy had been three dead men, four wounded ones, some weapons, and two armoured cars.

The Germans had now a fresh item, and a very big one, on the account that we had to settle with them.

On the 8th of September, we had our revenge. For the second time, the army made a *sortie* from Antwerp, and the Cavalry Division, forming the left wing, advanced towards Louvain. Information of all kinds poured in at Headquarters and one detail struck General de Witte, that chief of whom I can

never speak without the greatest respect and admiration. The General had been told that the village of Werchter was only weakly guarded. A bold stroke might make us masters of the passage of the Dyle. This stroke was to be attempted.

The execution of it was confided to the Battalion of Cyclist Carabineers, that heroic phalanx which does not need to be introduced to any one, so well is it known. Everyone is acquainted with our *diabls noirs* (black devils), those of Haelen, and of everywhere else where there were blows to be given and laurels to reap, that band of brave men who always set out laughing, dressed their wounds whilst singing, and returned to the fight the following day, their natural ardour increased by the desire to avenge the deaths of the previous day.

My armoured car set out at the head of the little column. Between Schriek and Tremeloo, a Company of Cyclists was left to serve as support for the two others who went forward. We arrived at Tremeloo. In this devastated and deserted village, Lieutenant Fritz de Menten and half a platoon of the 2nd Lancers were awaiting us. They confirmed the information that Werchter was only held by a small force. They had been assured that the Boche foot-soldiers, with the exception of those who were doing the cooking in the Square, were all busy getting drunk on *yack op* at the wine-shop.

What enthusiasm there was amongst us! Our two hundred and fifty Cyclists were relishing the joy that they would have in seeing their old acquaintances again, the Prussian pilferers, house-burners, and torturers. They set off in three columns. The middle one, which I led, took the direct road. Another

one turned to the left, in order to attack Werchter, by the Dyle. The third column took the plain to the right, in order to approach the village from the north. Lieutenant de Menten's half platoon served as scouts for the column on the left. We rushed off at full speed. The bridge over the Laak, a small tributary to the right of the Dyle, was soon crossed, the cycles were then left, and the sharp-shooters went off at a trot, stooping in order to be hidden in the harvest fields.

I reached the first houses in Werchter with my car. There was not a soul to be seen! This silence and mystery did not seem natural to us. A hundred yards away, the chief street was barricaded. An inhabitant assured us that the few Boches who had occupied Werchter had already taken flight in the direction of the bridges. We immediately took the machine-gun out of the car, together with its support and the cases of cartridges, intending to carry all this over the barricade, which the motor-car could not cross, and then sweep the bridge with balls, so that our prey should not escape us.

Berlaymont, with the machine-gun on his shoulder, and a cyclist carrying two cartridge cases, were the first to enter the street. They had not gone ten steps when they were greeted by a volley of bullets. The shooting was from all the windows and the cyclist had his arm broken. This volley was evidently a signal, as the whole circumference of Werchter now broke out into short flames. An infernal firing then took place, interspersed with the tac-tac-tac of Maxims. Werchter was a trap. We were attacking the enemy one against four, and our adversary was invulnerable behind the walls of the houses. Our

retreat was obligatory, but the question was, Could the destruction of the Battalion be avoided?

It is in these tragic moments that the worth of a troop can be judged. In reply to their officers' whistling, the Cyclists fell back in good order, replying at the same time to the enemy's firing. Just as though they were at drill, my men put back the machine-gun support in its box, and strapped it up, whilst the chief gunner put his cannon on its battery and awaited the order to fire. In the car, each man took the place assigned to him beforehand: the chief gunner standing up by the side of the driver. The latter charged the machine and also attended to his driving. The second gunner was seated in Turkish fashion at the back. He passed the charges full and arranged the empty cases. The chief was kneeling down at his side, the upper part of his body higher than the plating. It is his part to direct the aim, with the aid of his field-glasses. This is the dangerous post, at which three quarters of those killed in armoured cars have had their skulls pierced. I have been wounded twice in the head at this post.

Our Cyclists were now beginning to recross the Laak bridge, and we opened a rapid fire on the limits of Werchter, where the enemy appeared to be coming out in our pursuit.

Firing attracts firing, and a shower of balls crackled over the armoured car, passing close to our ears with the noise of huge, furious flies buzzing quickly through the air.

Our brave Hotchkiss fired without ceasing. The second gunner was tending his machine as though it were a pet animal. As soon as it had spit forth its shower of a hundred balls, he quickly put a pinch of

vaseline on the piston and a damp rag over the cannon. In five minutes, a thousand cartridges had been fired. The cannon was getting warm. From black, it had changed to blue and was mottled with spots. It had to be changed. We were advancing towards the Laak bridge, which all the Cyclists had now crossed. As we went along, we encouraged the wounded ones who were trying to crawl along as far as there. We changed the cannon whilst under fire. There was a bolt to draw, then a few blows of the mallet on a big key, the cannon was grasped between rags and plunged into a basin of cold water. With a hissing noise, a long spurt of boiling water flowed up-hill. Whilst the chief gunner examined the mechanism of his machine and greased it, his helper drew the second cannon from its sheath and put it in its place. With a thud, it settled and, the whole operation having taken forty seconds, we were once more ready to fire.

The enemy was now coming out from Werchter. I could see the lines of sharp-shooters distinctly. They were advancing in the fields of rye and beet-root.

"Do you see them?" I asked.

"Yes."

"At three hundred yards, mow them down with volleys of sixty, if you like, Fire!"

And our Hotchkiss continued its noise, which sounded like a huge sewing machine. Over yonder, we saw the grey fellows tumbling over each other, running, hiding. And the balls whizzed round us quicker than ever.

The Cyclists were still five hundred yards away from us in their retreat, but our cannon was again getting warm and, besides this, the extractor was dirty and

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some of the balls failed. We fell back a second time and, behind a hedge, the changing of the cannon again took place. This time we had the additional complication of changing the extractor. The enemy took advantage of this for advancing at full speed.

"Quick! quick! is everything ready?"

The car fell back. A hundred yards from the bridge there was a good place for it. From there we could see for five hundred yards along both sides of the route skirting the Laak. This time we were keenly on the watch. We no longer replied to the firing intended for us: it was no use wasting munition haphazard. The chief gunner to the right, and I to the left, watched the groups which arrived on the bank of the river.

Rrann! . . . and there was a charge¹ for each group. How many fell like that! It was good firing, with certain result. And there was no hurry now, so that the cannon only got gradually warm.

The combat had been going on for forty minutes. The Cyclists must have reached Tremeloo. There were still the wounded ones to look after. Berlaymont and I got down and picked up six or seven of them. We placed them on the chests, on the wings, on the platform, at the back, and even on the hood. This exasperated the Boches, who fired on us furiously. We now made off, but on the Tremeloo road, we came across about twenty poor wounded men, dragging themselves along in the most lamentable way. They stretched out their hands to us, beseeching to be picked up. It was impossible to abandon them. Six volunteers of the Cyclist rear-guard offered their services. They discovered a cart and an old horse which, by

¹ A charge comprises thirty cartridges placed on a metallic band.

some miracle, had remained among the ruins of a farm and, whilst they were doing this, the machine-gun received certain indispensable repairs. The car then started once more towards Werchter, followed by the cart transformed into an ambulance. About one hundred yards in front of the bridge, a wounded man was lying across the road. He begged to be picked up at once. We fastened him to the platform and thought no more about him, for the balls were raining down again. The Boches had crossed the bridge and we had to drive them back, so that we could pick up the wounded men. We advanced slowly, giving our enemies a hellish fire. They were running from hedge to hedge, quite near to us.

Lieutenant de Menten, who had been taken prisoner at the beginning of the action, and was freed later on, told us about this part of the fight. The Germans, two battalions and a squadron strong, dragged him along with them in the pursuit, and we came very near freeing him ourselves. For a short time, he was surrounded by the dead and he had to lie down flat in a ditch, in order to avoid sharing the fate of his keepers. We were only one hundred yards away. We had painted a gigantic 7 on our car, out of sheer bravado. A German officer told him that evening that that "cursed Number Seven" had killed more than two hundred men in an hour.

Our provision of 4500 cartridges was coming to an end though. We began to fall back a little, especially as the balls were now coming from right and left. There were no longer any wounded men on the road, as our brave Carabineers had worked well.

"Good Heavens!" we suddenly exclaimed "and what about the man we picked up and put at the back

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of the motor-car?" When our last volley was fired we visited him, expecting to find him in a piteous state. Miraculously, he had not a single scratch more than when we had picked him up, and yet the back of the car was riddled with marks of bullets. What a piece of good luck for him and, as for us, our men were all there; we had not lost one.

During that second *sortie* from Antwerp, we had magnificent chances of distinguishing ourselves every day. On the 10th of September, for instance, we started from Rhode St. Pierre with some Pioneers and, slipping between German posts and patrols, we reached Cumplich, near Tirlemont, about ten miles behind the enemy's lines. Whilst the Pioneers were destroying the railway line from Louvain to Liège, we kept a lookout on the road. A red auto came along. It was a Pipe, 12 horse-power, 1912, driven by a German soldier, and there were two conceited-looking officers in it. Berlaymont seized his carbine and, at a hundred yards' distance, fired twice. Each ball hit an officer straight. The car stopped short and the chauffeur held up his arms. We rushed forward, our Brownings in our hands. The two officers were on the floor of the car, with their heads open.

"What a pity," said Berlaymont, regretfully, "they have made a mess of the leather!"

After securing the chauffeur, we started along the road in our car. On approaching the sentinels, we called out to them: "Come here, or you are dead men."

Not one of the five prisoners we made attempted to defend himself. As soon as they saw the armoured car, they threw down their weapons and put their hands up. Some of them knelt down and asked for

pardon. On returning, our captured car came to a stand-still and the prisoner chauffeur repaired it with the most obsequious eagerness. The climax was that, just as we were setting off again, we heard a voice calling out: "Stop, stop, you have forgotten me." It was one of our prisoners, who had got down while the car was being repaired and whom we had not missed.

That same day, the 10th of September, I had two more big fights, and was able to advance as far as Blauwput, a suburb of Louvain. Unfortunately, this cost me the life of Corporal Royer, a very brave man who had already had honourable mention in his Division. In the afternoon, we had the Pellenberg fight, where the violent resistance of the German Marine Fusiliers stopped our progress.

Until we reached the Yser, my car was engaged on an average three times a day. It would be impossible to tell of all our skirmishes, so I will only give the most interesting episodes.

On the 27th of September, at Alost, my car was sheltering in the little street of the Morseel bridge, behind a barricade made of herring barrels. We had to wait there and could see nothing, whilst shells were falling all round us. Suddenly, a projectile fell right on the barricade and filled our car with herrings. It was a perfect infection, and never had our nostrils been poisoned by any odour as disagreeable as that. Whilst we were raging and holding our noses, a tall American fellow came up with a cinematograph photo apparatus.

"Captain," he said, "I am the operator of an American Cinematograph Company. May I have the honour of taking views of your motor-car in

fighting position?" We had scarcely recovered from our amazement, when a shell dropped on a neighbouring house, which immediately fell on us and on the American, in the midst of a cloud of dust and a frightful noise. With the most superb calmness, Berlaymont called to me: "Look out, it is always a good thing to notice the objective." He got up and began searching for the objective. Just at this moment, we saw the Cinema American, who had stepped back a few yards and, with his apparatus still on its three feet, was taking views phlegmatically.

Between eleven o'clock and twelve, we received orders to fall back one hundred yards, in order to support the platoon of the 5th Lancers, under the command of Lieutenant van den Elschen. It was entrenched behind a barricade of tan bales. Our enemies were not visible and we were only aware of their presence by the arrival of shells. One of these projectiles broke in the window of the Delhaize grocery shop. It was most providential for us, as it allowed us to lunch copiously on the verandah, free of charge, with a musical accompaniment, composed of the latest tango airs, played on the piano by Lieutenant Poncelet. Things went on very well until another shell knocked down a chimney. As this fell on the verandah, we had to move from there. We returned to our barricade and found the Cinema operator getting our horsemen to rehearse a "Defence of Alost." "I have only taken a bombardment, so far," he explained, "and I should like to get a real fight."

Amused at this idea, the officers allowed him to direct operations. Commanded in nigger French, our horsemen first repulsed an imaginary attack of

the enemy, by fire, and then executed a brilliant counter-attack. Victims were now wanted.

"Some dead men now, the ground must be strewn with corpses," ordered the American.

The excitement of the troops was such, though, that he had to repeat his injunctions, in order to keep the corpses lying still on the ground until the film had finished turning. These views appeared in the *Daily Mirror*, of October 1, 1914, under the title of "The Defence of Alost," and have been given in all the London Cinemas. My readers may, perhaps, see them later on on the screen at Brussels. They will know then that, of the whole story, only the bombardment was authentic.

On the 6th of October, our motor-car came very near having a fine feat of arms to its credit. At Schoonaerde, on the road from Wetteren to Termonde, the Germans had placed a battery of field Howitzers, which was bombarding our trenches on the left bank of the Escaut. The armoured car 7 and the Lancers were on observation about two miles away, near Wetteren, at the entrance to Wichelen. Between Schoonaerde and us, the road was only barred by the hamlet of Bohemen, which was weakly guarded by the enemy. We decided to attempt a big venture. Whilst Berlaymont, the man who feared nothing went off by the railway line with three sharp-shooters to attack Bohemen, I rushed into the hamlet at full speed with the motor-car. Some carts had been placed in a way to bar the road. Our car knocked them over, and we were then within six hundred metres of the enemy battery in action.

My chief gunner, Heureux, opened fire. It was a thing to see the way the artillery-men, taken by enfi-

lade, came down! Those who survived, and there were very few of them, cut the tethers of the horses, sprang on to their backs, and made off. We thought the battery was ours, but alas! it was not. The Belgian Artillery saw an armoured car in a place where there could only be Boches. It opened a quick fire on us. Their shells ploughed up the ground and our armoured car was riddled with shrapnel fragments. The Belgians aimed too well and we were obliged to leave. Half an hour was lost in telephoning to the Commander of the Artillery that he was mistaken. We rushed into Bohemen again and saw our cannons once more. What joy it was!

But the Boches had had time to cover them. To our right, fifty metres away, the hedge along the railroad was held by sharp-shooters with a machine-gun. In front of us, a farm and its kitchen garden on the road were also occupied, and we were greeted by a fearful, direct fire. I gave up my steering wheel, for when Berlaymont is not there, I am the only one who can drive, and directed the fighting. Handled by Heureux, a clever marksman, our machine-gun spit forth what was certain death. The firing became weaker from every place on which we turned our gun. Suddenly, I felt a double shock in my right arm. The Boche machine-gun had just presented me with two balls. Heaven be thanked, I had seen it though, and Heureux silenced it by bringing down its gunners. Suddenly, and without ceasing his work, Heureux called out to his aid: "Go on charging, I cannot do any more."

I looked and saw that his left hand had been torn off by a dum-dum ball. I had another terrible shock myself, this time in the head. I was conscious of falling from the car to the ground . . . and then

. . . I knew nothing more. When I came to myself I was lying at the bottom of the car, and my gun was still fizzling. It was being worked by the second gunner. Heureux, who had looked after me until I was conscious again, said, quite simply:

"Now that I have picked you up, it is your turn. You must drive the car." It was by no means easy. My right arm was useless, and the blood from the open wound on my temple half blinded me. As well as I could, altering the speed with my right foot, I was able to start the car. Under the fire of the Boches I had, once more, to overturn the carts they had again put in place.

At Wichelen, Berlaymont joined us again. He was furious that we had had an armoured car fight without him. And whilst the ambulance took Heureux and me off, he obtained a reserve machine-gun, installed himself in the car, all dripping with blood, and went off to kill a score of the Boches who had treated his friends in such an evil way.

CHAPTER XX

The Wavre-St. Catherine Combat

**BY SUB-LIEUTENANT HENROZ, IN COMMAND OF THE 1ST COMPANY
OF THE 1ST BATTALION OF THE 2ND REGIMENT OF FORTRESS
CARABINEERS**

(September 28-October 10, 1914)

As the Germans were harassed by the Belgian army and uneasy as regarded the flank of their line of communication, they decided to take their revenge on the Antwerp fortress, which was the refuge of our army after each of our offensive operations.

At the end of September, the enemy had received a reinforcement of troops of all kinds of arms, but more particularly of siege Artillery and Pioneers, as these had been freed by the fall of Maubeuge.

On the 27th of September, at 7 in the morning, I received orders to occupy the trenches with my Company and to suspend all work. My Company was in the interval of the Dorpveld redoubt and the Wavre-St. Catherine Fort. It was supported on the right by the Company of the Staff Deputy Captain Commander Havenith, who was in command of the interval. The Germans, that day, had commenced driving back the detachment of the 1st Army Division, which was holding the front of the line. We knew,

therefore, that they were going to attack us, but we were convinced that our positions were absolutely inviolable, as we had organised them so carefully and they were bristling with engines of warfare of every kind. We awaited the first contact, therefore, with the greatest confidence. The whole day was very calm all around the Fort. A Belgian aeroplane was brought down and fell in our lines, near to our little post.

Monday, September 28th. There was every promise of a fine day. Far away, in the background, two Boche captive balloons went up. They were rocking about at the wind's pleasure, in a threatening way. We could hear the purring of their motors. Both these signs were prophetic of an imminent attack. Towards 11 o'clock, a distant whizzing sound was heard. This was soon transformed into a thunderous roaring, which increased all the time and finished in a formidable explosion. Through the trench lookout, we could see, at about 150 metres in front of the Wavre-St. Catherine Fort, a column of smoke at least twenty yards high. It was a 420 millimetre which had just exploded. Exactly eleven minutes later, a second shell fell, with the same noise, within fifty yards of the glacis. Every man was ready, and all eyes were fixed on the Fort with anguish. We did not have to wait long for the third shell. Eleven minutes later it burst, straight on the Fort. . . .

"Poor Catherine!" said the men. In spite of her wounds, though, Catherine continued spitting forth her balls. The firing of the 420 continued, at intervals of eleven to twelve minutes, the whole of the morning. During the afternoon, the firing was still more intense and the shells then arrived in salvos of two. Many of

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them, fortunately for the Fort, missed their mark, but the resistance was seriously endangered. The cementing and the plating had only been calculated in view of a bombardment with guns of twenty-one centimetres at the most. We frequently saw five or six of the artillerymen come out from the earthworks and, between two storms, climb quickly on to the Fort and fill up the excavations, made by the projectiles, with sacks of earth. At the approach of the next bolides, they rushed away again as quickly as they could. Some of them even, braving the metal monsters, continued their work. These courageous men gave the soldiers in the trenches a fine example of heroism. We watched them in amazement and felt our own courage increase. The bombardment ceased at exactly 4.30 in the afternoon. The cement of the Fort was cracked and the passages blocked by the sickening odour of the gases. There was no victim on either side. The Wavre-St. Catherine Fort had received its baptism of fire.

Tuesday, September 29th. The 1st and 2nd Divisions were now in the 3rd Sector, Waelhem-Lierre; the 3rd and 6th Divisions in the 4th Sector, Waelhem-Escaut; the 4th Division occupied Termonde, and the 5th formed the general reserve. The bombardment began again at daybreak, and very soon the huge shells were falling thickly on the Fort. Occasionally, one of these masses, badly aimed, burst on the interval. It was a regular earthquake. The ground shook and it seemed as though the earth were about to open and swallow us up. Presently, the firing increased in intensity. At certain moments, the Fort was cannonaded, at a speed of twenty to twenty-five a minute, with shells of every calibre. The noise was deafening.

We could scarcely hear each other speak. Everyone feared for the Fort and each time that a shell was "drunk in" by it, the men murmured: "Poor Catherine!" Towards ten o'clock, the firing of shrapnels on to the interval commenced. Commander Havenith gave me the order to occupy the fighting trench, with a section. The remainder of my troop took up their quarters in the trench-shelter, about fifty yards behind us.

During this change, a volley of shrapnels fell on the communication trench. Four men were very slightly wounded, one of whom was Sergeant Claudot, a volunteer. We were obliged to evacuate him. Presently, it was the turn of the Wavre-St. Catherine village to get its share. Several of the volleys made a fair number of victims, some of whom were civilians. This caused a panic and the people, terrified and wild with fear, rushed off taking with them a few of their possessions. The women, in tears, dragged their little ones along with them, and the children, without knowing why, uttered the most heart-rending cries. Just as the darkness was coming on, several houses were in flames. We were present, and absolutely powerless, at this lamentable scene, and we were furious at not being able to avenge these unfortunate people. On every side, the cannon was thundering. The air, saturated with smoke, was bitter, and the odour of the powder was suffocating. Gradually, everything became calm once more and the sentinels went to their posts, just beyond the network of barbed wire. Up to the present, our cooking had always been done in the trench, by the side of the machine-gun shelter. During the bombardment, a wretched shell had plunged into the water in

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which the soup was cooking, and had scattered the meat and broth everywhere. As all communication with our rear was cut, it was impossible to get fresh food. I advised my men to be economical with what they still had and, above all, to keep their reserve rations at any cost. They were quite calm, unmindful of the danger they had run during the day, and they did not protest in the least. They went bravely to their observation posts, whilst their comrades took a little rest. The night passed by without any incident.

Wednesday, September 30th. The Company was still occupying the same position. The sun had scarcely risen, when the bombarding of the Forts, of the interval, and of the redoubt began as fresh as ever. A reinforcement arrived for me, the 2nd Company of the 3rd Battalion of the 6th Line Regiment, which at once occupied the shelter trench. More than three hundred men were huddled together in this hole. I began to fear a 42 dropping on this trench. What a horrible carnage it would be! I trembled to think of the danger my men were in. They never even thought of this themselves. They were delighted about the unexpected reinforcement and their one idea was victory. Shells of every calibre were raining down from every side, and shell-mines were exploding with a frightful noise. The firing was getting more exact and reached our parapet. The trench shook, and I wondered whether it would fall in. Fragments of the shells fell at our feet, and suddenly one shell hit the trench. As soon as the smoke was dispersed, we saw, with horror, that several men were buried under the *débris*. We could hear them calling out and, for the first moment, we all remained motionless, riveted to the spot in stupor and horror.

Then several men rushed to the rescue of their comrades. I advanced and saw that our poor Vander Stappen had been decapitated. His head lay intact at his feet. Three others, one of whom was Sergeant Doods, were seriously wounded. The shells continued to arrive in showers. It was frightful! The men were lying down on the ground, with their blankets over their heads to protect them from the shell fragments, and in order that they might not see anything. A soldier, near me, took out of his pocket-book the portrait of his wife and children. There were three of them grouped around their mother. During this infernal bombardment, the poor man, seeing death so near, wanted to see his own family once more. With tears in his eyes, he shook his head sadly. I sat down by him and, in a few words, I managed to revive his courage. He got up suddenly and, shaking his fist in the enemy's direction, called out: "Come on then, you vile Boches, we shall see whether you are as good with the bayonet as with your 42." He had scarcely uttered the last word, when a still more formidable explosion than all the others made us start. The powder room of the Fort had been blown up. Poor Catherine! Our Artillery, placed in the intervals, although like us subjected to a violent bombardment, was answering courageously. Our men were encouraged by this; they felt they were being supported. It was now exactly 11.45. A breathless messenger arrived and, with a trembling hand, gave me a sealed letter. It was an order from the Commander of the fortified position of Antwerp.

"In spite of the bombardment, no matter how terrible it may be, you must resist to the uttermost, even to death!" Good, we will resist!

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I dismissed the messenger, a boy of eighteen. Without troubling in the least about the shells and shrapnels, he hurried back to his post. The Germans were still bombarding the Dorpveld redoubt furiously. A 42 fell on a house near the Fort. Nothing was left of it but a heap of ruins, and some of the bricks fell into our trench. The hours passed by and the day gradually came to an end. In the evening, the cannonading was less intense and the soldiers took advantage of this to move about and stretch their limbs. They were gay, glad to see each other again, and to have escaped death. They were also awaiting the arrival of the Boches most hopefully. The results of the day's combat had been: one killed and five wounded. When once the little posts were all organised, everyone was on the watch. None of the men wanted to rest. They were convinced that there would be a night attack and they all wanted to be there, in order to fire the first shot, and to receive the enemy in a proper way. Contrary to our expectation, the night passed by without incident, except for a few patrols being seen near the village.

Thursday, October 1st. The Company occupied the same post. The bombardment, both in the intervals and on the positions in the rear, began again and was still more terrible than on the preceding days. The Boches poured down upon us their projectiles of every calibre. Our men remained there undaunted, in spite of showers of shot. The batteries replied all the time. The Forts alone were silent, as they had been completely destroyed. The bombardment continued with the most intense violence, as though the enemy wanted to crush us

completely, by means of the heavy artillery, against which we were, of course, powerless. The noise was beyond all description. In less than twenty minutes, I counted three men killed and about ten wounded. My trench seemed likely to be entirely destroyed and, at all costs, it was necessary to repair it. At my request, several volunteers came forward and, in spite of the bombardment, worked energetically. The losses were great, but not a man dreamed of budging from his post. The order had come to resist to the uttermost, to hold out in spite of everything, and we intended to obey. We were resolved to die at our posts if necessary. The shells continued all the time to rain down on us. In the village of Wavre-St. Catherine, the ravages were terrible. The whole locality trembled under a continuous roar like thunder. It was in this hell that the soldiers entrusted with the defence had to hold out. Sub-Lieutenant Blanckaert and his gunners were stationed near the church. They took shelter as best they could, and one of the most imposing sights was their coolness under the infernal bombardment. The enemy Artillery, with its usual sacrilegious rage, aimed at the Church, which was still standing. The steeple was just hit and some houses near fell in ruins. From time to time, a more formidable explosion was heard, and someone would remark simply: "That's another 42." It was very evident that the enemy was endeavouring to render our positions impossible by the intensity of the bombarding, hoping thus to demoralise us. In our poor trench, which shook and rocked in a way calculated to give us all sea-sickness, the sight was terrifying. Each time that a shell of big calibre struck it, whole positions gave way, burying together

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the dead, the wounded, and the living. Two, three, and four huge shells a minute fell on it.

The captain of the 6th Line Regiment, M. Bisschop,¹ fell at my side, with his shoulder shattered. In the trenches, the men held out, in spite of the horrible nervous tension, of thirst, of the sight of their comrades cut up, and of the plaintive moans of the wounded. Sergeant-Major Demarche was also wounded. Our batteries were firing at full speed, but they too suffered, as they were sighted by the accursed captive balloons. Shrapnels and mine-shells burst over our cannons, which were destroyed, one after the other. Our brave gunners lay there at the side of them. It was horrible! The situation grew more and more critical. In the absence of the Captain of the 6th Line Regiment, who had been evacuated, I had to take command of the trench. At exactly 2.30 in the afternoon, we suddenly saw two men in the wire network, two hundred yards in front of the Fort. They were certainly Boches, but what were they doing there, as their own shells were falling near them? Three volleys were fired from the trench of Captain Commander A. E. M. Havenith. One of the Boches fell and got up again. He fell a second time, and the other one made off. A quarter of an hour later he returned, accompanied by two comrades, wearing an armlet and waving a Red Cross flag. Not a shot was fired, and the wounded man was taken to the German lines. The bombardment continued and was only less intense towards nightfall. The Commander of the Fort, who had evacuated his stronghold, took advantage of the lull to go back to it, but it was partly destroyed. The heavy shield of a cu-

¹ In spite of several operations the Captain is still crippled.

pola of fifteen centimetres had completely disappeared, and its ruins were also on fire. I had the dead buried, and the wounded taken away. Towards five o'clock, I received an order from the Commander of the interval to occupy the fighting trench with the two Companies. An attack was expected during the night. When once my observation sentinels were at their posts, we awaited the arrival of the Germans. We took advantage of a moment's lull to eat something. The men had nothing left but their last reserve rations. We did not know what we should do for eatables the following day. The men were very thirsty, their throats were parched, and there was no water. Some of them found some behind the trench. It was rather muddy, but that did not matter, as it refreshed them. Guessing that I, too, was thirsty, one of the brave fellows offered me his flask.

"Thanks," I replied, "keep it for to-morrow. I am not thirsty."

"But, Lieutenant, there is sugar with it!!!" he insisted.

I was just on my way to visit my posts, and had scarcely gone twenty steps when a Corporal arrived.

"Lieutenant," he said, "the Boches are there, near the wire."

I listened and sure enough the bells fastened to the wire were tinkling. There was no doubt about it. They were there. I gave the command, "Fire!" and my men opened a vigorous firing on the wire network. It was a hellish firing. The bullets cut the wire and thousands of sparks were soon flying. The redoubt, that everyone believed destroyed, was soon aglow like a furnace and sent showers of shot on the enemy. My men shouted "Victory!" and were

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delighted to open fire, but furious at not seeing any Boches. The night was as black as ink and we could not see two yards in front of us.

The Germans, surprised in their attack, replied energetically, but they fired over us. Three quarters of an hour later, all was calm once more. From time to time, a few enemy balls fell behind us, as though they were aimed at a wall which did not exist. We all had the same impression. They were explosive bullets. Several patrols were sent to search in the neighbourhood. I let half of the men rest. As I had scarcely any ammunition left, I sent Sergeant-Major Cromphout to ask Captain Commander Havenith to let me have some cartridges without fail. I learnt afterwards that the Sergeant-Major never arrived. What happened to him? Was he killed, or had he only disappeared? The night passed by without any other event.

October 2nd. At daybreak, the enemy's heavy artillery recommenced its destructive firing. The Duffel bridge was attacked by shells of 13 centimetres. More than 250 shells fell on the station in less than two hours and a half. The Wavre-St. Catherine Fort and the Dorpveld redoubt were covered afresh with projectiles. These were the preliminaries of an Infantry attack. Towards 6.45, over two hundred men appeared, marching in close ranks, on the Malines road and, crossing the fields, went at full speed in the direction of the redoubt. I at once commanded quick firing. My men aimed well and, at two hundred yards' distance, whole ranks were mown down. These were quickly replaced by others, which, in their turn fell under the firing of our Mausers. Suddenly, the whole band stopped

short and a few men began waving Belgian flags and white flags. We could now distinguish their uniforms better and we saw that these belonged to our Line Regiments.

"Stop firing they are our men!" called out the soldiers. Instead of this, I gave orders to continue firing. The Germans had once more violated the laws of warfare, by clothing their troops in our uniforms, stolen from our dépôts. The firing began again more violently now than before and, of all these troops, only about thirty men reached the redoubt and at once hid in the ditches. One of them, who was carrying posters, put these up at the top of the redoubt, the inside towards the enemy. I could not read signals of this kind. The firing ceased and, ten minutes later, one of the posters fell and about twenty Germans then made off in the direction of their lines. A few seconds later, we heard the *mac-mac* of their machine-guns placed above the redoubt. They were turned in our direction and their balls pierced our loopholes. Sergeant Chaignot, a volunteer, who had his gun pointed at one of the machine-guns, fell down dead, hit in the forehead. This brave boy, who was only just seventeen, was the only son of a widow. A short lull enabled me to have our wounded men evacuated.

The enemy now only bombarded our positions in the rear. Just when the German Artillery began to lengthen its firing range, the enemy Infantry suddenly emerged from somewhere, yelling! "Hoch!" They rushed towards the Wavre-St. Catherine Fort. I had orders to hold out to the uttermost, but, as I was turned on my right and had scarcely any cartridges left, it was evident that I should be surrounded. To

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the right, Captain-Commander Havenith, who was outflanked, was falling back in good order. There was no safety for me, therefore, on that side. I saw that I should be compelled to beat a retreat in the direction of the chapel, some five hundred yards behind our line. Corporal Deron and about ten men remained behind to continue firing until the last soldier had left the trench.

I have to deplore the loss of many victims. The accursed machine-guns of the redoubt mowed down about twenty of my men. Many of them were wounded and, as we could not take them away, they remained, unfortunately, in the hands of the Germans. When we had reached the post at the chapel, which was our second line, I gave orders to occupy the new trench. We had not time to do this, as about fifty Teutons, whom I had not seen, fired, from their ambush, at our flank and several of my men fell. We were compelled to retreat again, leaving our wounded behind. We were pursued as far as Poupelaerstraat, where, worn out and exhausted, my Company halted for a short rest.

We were all thankful to have escaped the enemy. If we had stayed five minutes longer in the trenches, we should all have been prisoners. I next went in the direction of Elzemtraat, to our concentration spot, the Duffel bridge. On entering the village, I met Captain-Commander Havenith. He was glad to see me again after these terrible days. He congratulated me on having held out valiantly with my men during the five days of furious bombardment, and on having fallen back in good order. During the rest that I gave to my men, I found that seventy-five soldiers were missing at the general roll-call. They had been killed

or wounded, or had disappeared. Two officers only remained, First Sergeant Coppens and I. We thought we had earned a few days' rest in the rear, but, as soon as we had been supplied again with cartridges and provisions, we received orders to take up our position once more between Wavre-St. Catherine and Duffel.

We were greeted there by a fresh bombardment. Outflanked on our right, in the direction of Waelhem, we were obliged to fall back on Duffel. It took us some time to pass through this village, as it was being bombarded by shells of big calibre. We soon received orders to fall back at any cost. We went along quickly, crossed the Duffel bridge, which was being shelled with absolute frenzy. We rushed along like a hurricane and drew up beyond the village, without having lost a single man. We were then ordered to fall back on Linth, where we arrived in the evening. Commander Havenith had received the same order. The rest of the regiment was there. I was present when the chief of the Corps congratulated Sergeant Delobbel on his fine conduct under fire, and his bravery during the bombardment. At the risk of his own life, he had saved his Commander (Commander Van der Minnen), who had been buried in the trench. Another feat of this sub-officer deserves to be recorded. His Company was just between the Koningshoyckt Fort and the Borsbeek redoubt. The gunners of a 75 battery, which supported the trench on the left, had left their cannons behind. These cannons would be extremely useful against the German cannons and the Boche Infantry, which was installed only eight hundred yards away from the position.

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Without any hesitation, carried away by his patriotism, Delobbel, who knew how to handle a cannon, offered himself for putting the battery into action again. With three men, one of whom was a wounded gunner, he went to the battery. All the defences were shattered and there was no longer any earthwork to count on. Under the direct fire of the Infantry and the big cannons, Sergeant Delobbel wanted to begin firing at six hundred yards, but unfortunately the gunners had unfastened the breeches and other parts before leaving. With the straps of their knapsacks, the brave fellows improvised what was necessary and very soon their cannons opened an infernal fire. Unfortunately, exposed to the firing of the Infantry, two of the improvised gunners were disabled and a fragment of shrapnel killed the third. Two cannons were thus useless, but our sub-officer continued alone, and the shells fell fast on the Boches. Very soon, though, completely exhausted, fired at fiercely from ambush and his last cannon destroyed, he was obliged to burrow, and it was impossible for him to return to the trench until the evening. Needless to describe the welcome he received there!

CHAPTER XXI

The Death-Struggle of Lierre Fort

BY AN OFFICER OF THE GARRISON

No harvest of impressions will be found in this account, for, although it might seem that the garrison of a Fort must be crowded together within the narrow surface occupied by the building, it is in reality dispersed everywhere: three men here, ten there, in the cupolas, in the munition stores, at the observation posts. Each man is in his special department and the contact is much less close than among the troops in campaign.

When, on account of the destruction of certain parts of the Fort, the garrison comes gradually nearer together, the moral tension, the lack of sleep, the irregularity of the alimentation transform the garrison into a passive troop under an avalanche of blows. The men are still capable of reaction and of desperate efforts, but the efforts are silent and, as it were, mechanical. Those who have never lived through such hours can never know the intensity of the suffering endured by the defenders of the Fort.

September 27, 1914. The cannon is roaring in the distance and appears to be coming nearer. We can

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hear Waelhem and Wavre-St. Catherine firing quite distinctly. Huge tufts of white smoke rise above the trees in the distance. The Malines Tower has disappeared entirely in the smoke.

For the last few days, every man has been at his post. German troops, probably on patrol, have been signalled to us by our watchers, at a distance of more than 8500 yards from the Fort. They are too far away for us to do anything. The attack is imminent.

Our men are resolute and their one wish is to open fire.

The day and night have passed without any incident.

September 28th. The morning has been calm for us. The cannon is roaring all the time. Our telephonic communications inform us that Waelhem and Wavre-St. Catherine are being bombarded violently. At two in the afternoon, our observation posts signal to us the occupation, by enemy groups, of localities within our radius of action. The cupolas of fifteen centimetres open fire and will continue until evening.

The first firing of our cannon was a veritable relief. The nervous tension, caused by waiting, is over, and the whole Fort is gay and animated.

At 8 o'clock, bombardment by the Forts of the agglomerations along the Aerschot road, where we had been informed that the enemy was quartered.

There has been no reply from the enemy.

The aviation had informed us of the construction of siege batteries within our defence sector. We could do nothing against them, on account of the distance.

September 29th. With the exception of our firing yesterday, all has been calm.

At 7.30 this morning, characteristic whizzing sounds warned us that shells were passing over the Fort.

The explosions took place a long way off, probably at Lierre. The screen of trees hides the town from us. By telephone, we heard that shells were falling at the gates of Louvain. Before long, it was our turn. Shrapnels came first, and their strident, metallic explosion surprised our men. Presently shells burst on the masonry of the barracks. Our T. S. F. antenna is cut. This is the first phase of our isolation. We are replying vigorously to the enemy's fire.

At 11 o'clock, suspension of the firing. The men brought into the firing gallery fragments of shells and shrapnels, bullets and fuses. From one of the fuses, we found that the measurement of the Germans is at 5200 yards, which is the average of our own measurement on the batteries indicated.

At 2 o'clock, the firing on both sides began again. We received projectiles of 13 centimetres by 5, one of which had fused and came rolling in front of our office. The town of Lierre was still being bombarded and we were informed that the civil hospital had been struck and that eight persons had been killed.

At 5 o'clock, suspension of the firing. At 7.30, renewal which did not last long and was not very efficacious.

With all this the Fort has not suffered much. There are a number of holes, chiefly in the barracks masonry, above which simili-cupolas had been installed. A cupola of fifteen centimetres had been grazed and a few window-panes broken. All is well and the spirits of the men excellent. They are getting bolder and bolder and we are compelled to stop them moving about in the open.

Sixty-four shells have struck the Fort. We learned, by telephone, in the evening, that Wavre-St. Catherine

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Fort, shattered by formidable shells, had been evacuated. We have heard nothing about the Waelhem Fort. It has no doubt met with the same fate. This sad news was only announced to the officers.

At 11.30, an observer warned us of the approach of a column by the Aerschot road. We accordingly fired on this road and the land around until about 1.30.

September 30th. At 3.40, a grouping of enemy troops was announced to us beyond the village of Koningshoyckt. At the same time the Fort of that name and the Tallaert redoubt, which were both being attacked, appealed for support to the Lierre Fort. Acting on information from them, and with the aid of their interval observatories, we opened fire which continued until 6 o'clock. There was no sleep for any one at night, and this will not be the last night of the kind. From henceforth there will be no more rest for us.

At 8 o'clock, the bombardment recommenced, not only on the Lierre Fort but also on the interval constructions and on the forts and redoubts to our right. A few shrapnels came first, and then a deluge of shells of every calibre. Not a single pane of glass could resist this, and the very ground shook under our feet. This sensation of springy ground will continue for several days after the bombardment.

At 11 o'clock, utter silence. The interior platforms are damaged and all circulation within the Fort is difficult, but our armament is still in perfect condition.

At 12.20, there was an ominous whizzing sound first, and then a noise like an express train at full speed. The projectile fell above the barracks with a formidable detonation. After this, a shower of cement

and of masonry fell on the whole of the Fort. We have just received the first 420 shell. Without inter-mittance until 6 o'clock, a similar projectile has arrived every six minutes. We have received fifty-seven of them in this way. The craters measured from 8 to 10 metres in diameter. The stoppers were flung 50 metres up in the air and they came down again like fresh projectiles. One of the first of these shells fell near us. The lower part, thrown vertically, fell on the edge of the crater. Its dimensions were remarkable. The fitter was told to go, *after the bombardment* and bring this in, in order to weigh and measure it. He went off at once, during the bombardment, and after twenty minutes of effort dragged the piece into the office. He was reproved for this unnecessary imprudence. The soldier replied simply: "But it was not hot!" This piece measured 388 millimetres in diameter and weighed 66 kilogrammes. Other fragments picked up had sharp edges: one of them measured 85 centimetres in length. The explosion produced a black, bitter, and very dense smoke, which curled round on the ground and was very slow in dispersing.

The interior telephonic communications are still practicable, with the exception of the battery adjoining the glacis of the semi-front left gorge.

The barracks have partially given way and the officers' pavilion is cut in two. This does not trouble us, as these places were evacuated a few days ago and orders were given not to stay in them. From the caponier of the front gorge, we were told by telephone that the vault was cracked and that the stoke holes were obstructed by earth, and also by the *débris* of masonry thrown up by the explosions in the immedi-

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ate vicinity. This was evacuated. As to the cupola of fifteen centimetres on the left, we were informed that the cuirass of 5 cent. 7 of the salient I. had been thrown up in the air and had fallen about twenty yards from the tower. A shell had fallen in front of the postern entrance, about fifty yards long, and the compression of air had caused this damage. A cannon of 8 cent. 7, placed for firing at aeroplanes and Zeppelins, had been flung from its position, the gun carriage had been entirely turned round and one wheel broken.

When the bombardment ceased, we rushed out to see for ourselves what the damages were, whilst our cannons continued firing in order to relieve the Koningshoyckt Fort, which had several of its pieces too much injured to use, and also the Tallaert redoubt, which was threatened with a frontal attack.

The archways were cracked everywhere and the paving-stones were torn up out of the ground, which was all furrowed and broken up. Some of the communication passages were destroyed. The diameter of the craters was greater than the distance which separated the jambs. These were all weakened and the heavy cement arches, deprived of their support, were absolutely broken, as though they had been hacked by a gigantic blow from an axe. This bombardment had not disturbed the equanimity of the soldiers much.

When the masonry or the cement was struck, a shower of bricks and of shingle covered the Fort, pouring through all the openings violently. The first time this happened, two men who were at the entrance of a postern were bruised by the shingles. A jocular man remarked: "Good, now they are putting pebbles in their shells!"

We heard groans though from the barrack ruins, and we dragged out one wounded man and two who had been killed. They were civilian workmen who had come there to install loud-speaking telephones.

The wounded man told us that two or three men, one of whom was a soldier, were under the ruins of what had served as a mess-room for the troop. It was impossible to get them out from under the heaps of ruins.

The battery of the glacis was destroyed by two projectiles. We found neither dead nor living men there. What had become of the gunners? All was not lost, however, as, with the exception of the cupola of 5 cent. 7 of salient I. all our defence works are still in good condition and our men do not manifest any anxiety.

October 1st. In obedience to orders from our chief, and together with the neighbouring forts and the interval batteries, we opened a rapid fire of twenty minutes' duration, at 2 and at 4 o'clock, on the localities and the roads in front of our line of defence.

At 7 o'clock we buried our dead.

From 8 o'clock, the intervals, the Koningshoyckt Fort and the Tallaert redoubt were actively bombarded. Our turn did not come until 10.15. Only nine projectiles were sent to us.

At 1 o'clock the bombardment began again and, as on the previous day, a shell came every six minutes.

Towards 3 o'clock, the semi-caponier on the right was hit. The aim had been shortened, as the firing had hitherto generally been directed at the left half of the Fort. Most of the men had taken refuge in the right half. On this account, no one was wounded, but the fifteen centimetre cupola was disabled

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by the blocks of cement coming from the half demolished tower. Some of these blocks measured nearly a cubic yard. The men were quickly evacuated to the front.

A gunner, bringing information bulletins, now arrived all covered with mud. As the cupolas had been covered with soaked earth, the men thought that he must have taken this covering off by crawling over the cupola, and his comrades blamed him for this. The good fellow was surprised at their accusation, as he had simply rolled into a crater under the firing, and this was why he was in such a muddy state.

The bombardment continued and we saw that our intact shelters were becoming fewer and fewer. The Artillery Commander fell into a crater. He could not walk and had to be taken to the Infirmary. The Commander of the Fusiliers, overworked and intoxicated by the gas from the explosions, was ill and one of the doctors was ill too. The influence of the gases became more and more distressing. Some of the men had fainting fits, others wept. Certain of them were depressed and seemed to be awaiting the shell which should finish them off. Neither persuasions nor threats from the Commander of the Fort, aided by the doctor and the chaplain, took any effect on these men, who were awaiting death like irresponsible cattle.

Towards 7.30 in the evening, this infernal bombardment slackened and very soon it ceased. The Fort had received 60 of the terrible 420 shells. The Commander of the Lierre-Tallaert interval announced an attack by the enemy Infantry supported by field Artillery.

The men pulled themselves together, the cupolas were occupied, and the firing line filled with machine-gunners and Fusiliers. The Tallaert redoubt could not do much and asked for help.

We fired with all our pieces on to the ground in front of the accessory defences of the interval. The enemy attack, under our firing, was defeated about 9 o'clock. All the garrison had taken part in the fight, even our invalids. The Commander of the Fusiliers went back to his post on the rampart.

The Fort was once more bombarded and at 11 o'clock, a fresh attack on the interval began, without any better result for the enemy than the first one.

October 2nd. At 2 o'clock, the third attack on the interval began. The firing line on the front of the Fort head was inundated with cartridges from the enemy machine-guns. Our Fusiliers replied with fury. Their Commander had the hardest work to regulate the firing. The heated guns got choked. No matter, our men were determined the Germans should not pass. Our cannons fired at full speed. The noise was deafening. For more than two hours, we lived in the midst of this hell and we no longer heard the enemy's balls which came in swarms whizzing over our heads. One of the cannons was disabled by the firing. The second one did double work, but before long could not keep its place in the battery either.

At 4.30, we knew by the red fuses, that the enemy was retreating. The interval had not been crossed and not a single wire of the accessory defences had been cut. This success gave our men fresh hope and confidence; they were almost joyful. Their fatigue was very evident though. As soon as the enemy attack was withdrawn, the firing gallery stopped

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replying to calls. We went to see what was happening and found the whole staff asleep. The officer had thrown himself down on a mattress, and on getting up he staggered with fatigue. There had been a few minutes' respite and all the men, not having to keep on the alert, had succumbed to their exhaustion.

The Commander of the Fort himself, a little time before, had fallen asleep in a cupola in full action.

The Commander of the Fort Artillery, who still could not walk, was evacuated, together with another wounded man. Food was then distributed and repairs done. The replenishing of the cupolas with ammunition was effected, thanks to the covered passages that were still intact.

At 7.20 the bombardment began once more. Enemy aeroplanes had been to see the state of the Fort, and the destruction then became systematic. Every six minutes a 420 projectile arrived—"the block train," as the men called it. We watched the progress of the bombardment with great anxiety.

The projectiles could be heard from afar, and they struck first the left and then the right of the Fort. The flank salients being very close together, the blow struck either one or the other of these projections indifferently. The soldiers remarked this and made bets as soon as the sound of the projectiles was heard in the distance. The salient I. was well sprinkled first and then the firing was on the front. The covered passage to the right of the front gave way. It was by this that the ammunition supply for the cupolas was effected. How many men were under the ruins? A roll-call was impossible. We had to evacuate part of the front, and half of the staff had to take refuge in the semi-caponier on the right.

All telephonic and telegraphic communication was cut off. The Lierre office no longer replied, as the town had been evacuated.

The firing now approached the right semi-caponier, and a shell burst fifteen yards from the entrance.

The men were ordered to keep at the other side of the Fort, which was no longer bombarded. It was impossible to warn those who had remained at the front caponier. The explosions continued every six minutes, and the bombardment was carried on systematically by series, and in an invariable manner. By observing where the projectiles fell, we could calculate just the moment when it would be time to move away. The first firing of a series was dangerous for us. As soon as the explosions followed each other too quickly, the men collected together, as soon as they heard the whizzing, waited for the projectile to fall, and then rushed off to their fresh shelter.

This game could not, however, continue very long. The projectiles seemed to be following us, and the arches gave way one after another after we had left them.

Towards 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the order was given to the Commander of the Fusiliers to collect his men in groups and to send them, in the intervals between the firing, to the postern gate of the Fort, which, so far, was intact. The order was carried out and we were able to pass, in the most miraculous way, between the projectiles. The firing now continued for some time on the left part of the Fort and the men grouped themselves on the berm in the space which separates the parapet from the moat against the outside talus of the semi-front of the right

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gorge. Just at that moment the two hundred and thirty-fifth 420 shell fell on the Fort.

With the exception of the danger from the pieces of masonry and from the explosions, which did not injure any one seriously, we were fairly safe. Towards noon, the projectiles came more frequently and the men who were under the entrance postern and in the guard-room were called inside. All the defence works were by this time either destroyed or of no use. The corridors and posterns were obstructed by huge blocks of masonry. The cupola of 5 centimetres 7 of salient IV. was the only one which appeared to be in good condition, but it was impossible to get to it. The garrison's last shelter was now threatened in its turn. A projectile burst on the edge of the moat, a few yards beyond the entrance to the Fort, and this caused a moment's panic. The bombardment continued, making it impossible for us to reoccupy the building. At 2.30, a formidable detonation and a dense smoke made us presume that the Koningshoyckt Fort had just been blown up.

We saw that the firing of our field-batteries, which were in position at the back of us, had shortened their aim, in order to cover the retreat of the troops in the intervals. Their shrapnels burst just at the height where we were stationed. German batteries were now placed to the right of the Fort, so that we were caught between two fires.

It was not possible for us to re-enter the ruined Fort. The 420 shells continued to fall on it every six minutes with hopeless regularity. Our reserve rations and cartridges were buried under the ruins. There was no more drinking water, the guns were empty, and the men starving with hunger.

There was, perhaps, just time to prevent ourselves from being surrounded. We had to make the attempt under a deluge of shrapnels. The men were worn out, and it was with a feeling of intense sadness and discouragement that, at 6 o'clock, the officers decided to take them toward Lierre. The defence had lasted four interminable days, under a bombardment which allowed of no rest and which prevented our relieving each other. Counting beforehand on the demoralising effects of their terrible engines of warfare, the Germans had imagined that on the night of the 1st to the 2nd of October, a strong attack would make them masters of the Fort.

Their three attempts at assault were so many failures for them. When, twenty-four hours later, they actually entered the Fort, it was merely a heap of ruins which fell into their hands.

Fighting is nothing if only one can return the blows one receives. The range of the enemy's Artillery was considerably beyond ours, so that they were protected from our firing. We were obliged to wait, with folded arms, until Death saw fit to take us.

This waiting, in a dark passage of masonry, which one knows is doomed to be destroyed and which every six minutes is in danger of being dashed to pieces by the projectiles that one hears coming, means enduring the agony of death over and over again.

Such an experience acts on the best tempered nerves, and the heroism of those who awaited death there, simply because they had been ordered to do so, was all the more admirable because it was simple, unobtrusive heroism, about which the world has hitherto never known.

CHAPTER XXII

Prisoner in the Soltau Camp

**FROM THE ACCOUNT GIVEN BY AMAND HASEVOETS, FIRST
SERGEANT OF THE REGIMENT OF FORTRESS GRENADIERS**

I BELONGED to a Company of the Fortress Grenadiers' Regiment. We occupied the interval between the Kessel and Broechem Forts when, on the 4th of October, 1914, the bombardment commenced. The Germans began with shrapnels for regulating their firing, and then, at intervals from five to ten minutes, they sent their shells on to Broechem. According to whether the projectile fell into the sand, into the moat, or on to the cement, a yellow, black, or white sheaf rose ten yards high in the air.

Towards evening, we received orders to protect a column of soldiers belonging to the Engineers, whose mission was to destroy the bridges over the Nèthe. Hidden in the fields, we saw figures gliding along by the river. In the darkness of the night, there were five immense glows and five detonations. The bridges had been blown up at Broechem, the cannonading slackened, and flames surrounded the Fort.

We fell back on the second line of defence. We passed through Wyneghem, Burght, and Zwyndrecht, where the regiment rejoined us. The soldiers who

had marched about thirty-seven miles, and for weeks had had no other beds than the trenches, were worn out. They had scarcely piled arms when most of them were stretched out on the pavement. The inhabitants, from the thresholds of their houses, looked at the Grenadiers with curiosity mingled with fear. What had these troops come to do here? The sight of a few coins reassured them, and very soon a carefully prepared little meal was ready in every house. The following day, we continued our retreat by the St. Nicholas road. The cannon was roaring and the ground trembling under a rain of shells, which interrupted our march and obliged us to await the end of the storm lying down among the beet-root, or turnip plants.

At Beveren-Waes, the Colonel called the officers together and talked to them for a long time. They came back to us gloomy and discouraged.

"We are surrounded," they said, "by an enemy of overpoweringly superior numbers. All resistance would be useless. Our last and only resource is to get to Holland."

Desperate, and with tears in their eyes, the soldiers talked in low voices to each other, giving utterance to their opinions.

"Fancy being shut up there without having fought, without having seen the enemy! How humiliating!"

The regiment, however, was soon on the way towards Clinge and, in the midst of a heavy fog, made a passage along the road which was encumbered with carts and vehicles of every kind, in the midst of a distracted population in flight. The soldiers thought sadly of their departure from Brussels two months ago, of the enthusiasm, the pride and confidence

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which they had felt, as they set out, on a bright sunny day, singing as they went along the Wavre road, amid the cheers and applause of the crowd.

On approaching the frontier, the men threw down their guns, cartridge cases, and bags. For several miles the ground was strewn with articles of equipment. This sight roused my indignation.

"No," I exclaimed, "whatever happens, I am not going to Holland!" I picked up some cartridges and stuffed all my pockets with them, and whilst my comrades crossed the frontier, I went with big strides towards the Lokeren road.

I have no idea how long a time I walked, for I was like a madman. At every instant, patrols appeared on whom I fired. Auto-machine-guns passed along at full speed and, hidden in a ditch, scarcely daring to breathe, I waited until these terrible engines of warfare had disappeared. By incredible luck, escaping all kinds of danger, I reached the suburbs of Lokeren. Peasants were working peacefully in the fields. I approached them and asked whether there were any Prussians in the town.

"More than 100,000," was the reply.

"Where can I find some civilian's clothes?" I asked.

"Over yonder, in that farm. They will probably give you some."

I entered the farm and, after a little discussion, I obtained some clothes for fifteen francs, which I at once put on. After burying my gun and my uniform, emboldened by my disguise, I advanced fearlessly along the Lokeren road.

"Who goes there?" I heard someone call out.

"An inhabitant of Lokeren," I answered.

"Hands up!"

I obeyed.

"Advance!"

- I obeyed again. I had happened upon a Bavarian patrol hidden behind the trees on the road. I was questioned briefly and then taken to join a hundred and fifty civilians in hiding along the hedge. After waiting for an hour, as the mouse-trap did not catch any fresh victim, the commanding officer, a Lieutenant, addressed us.

"As you are peaceable citizens, I am going to have you taken back to the town."

We set out escorted by Bavarian soldiers. Near the bridge over the Durme, a Lieutenant, stationed in front of a manufactory, was awaiting us.

"Come in here!" he said. We entered and, inside the courtyard, we saw piles of uniforms belonging to the Belgian Engineers. We were ordered to put them on. I went to the officer and protested. "I am not a soldier and I am not going to act this comedy," I said. By way of answering, the Lieutenant seized my hands. With a pen-knife he took some of the dirt from my nails and smelt it. He then took a little bottle, poured some liquid over this dirt, and smelt it again. After this, he gave me a blow with his fist.

"Your hands are not the hands of a labourer, but of a soldier," he yelled. "Obey, or you will be shot."

Under the surveillance of two soldiers, who carefully inspected my under linen, I put on the uniform and took my place among the Belgian soldiers they had thus improvised. Grouped in a column, we were triumphantly promenaded through the Lokeren streets, and insults and jokes were lavished on us by the German soldiery. The parade ended, after a

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mock interrogation, we were taken to a place without any egress and obliged to bury a lot of dead horses already in a state of decomposition.

Whilst doing this, I took note of my surroundings and I saw, on the right, the entrance to a dark passage. Taking advantage of a moment of inattention, I slipped into this. It was an ice-house. It was intensely dark, but I groped along and crouched down behind some blocks of ice, where I spent several hours shivering with cold. I could hear the expressions of disgust uttered by my companions during their repulsive task.

When this was accomplished, a sub-officer took it into his head to count the men.

"There is one missing," he remarked.

One of us, a wretched spy, denounced me.

"He is in the ice-house," he said.

The Germans entered, discovered me, and literally kicked me out. No one can imagine my state of fury and rage. If only any of these wretches ever fall into my hands, they will have no time to feel bored, for I am reserving for them a little fête of my own invention. On Tuesday, eight hundred English soldiers and three hundred Belgian soldiers were added to our number. They were real soldiers this time. As some of the Belgian ones were in civilian dress, I made an arrangement with one of them to change my uniform for his clothes. It would be more easy in this way to play my part as a citizen.

The following day, escorted by Bavarians, we set out on foot and were taken to Termonde, a march of about twelve miles. The walk was very painful, as our only food was the turnips that the soldiers gathered in the fields and threw to us.

Termonde was frightful to behold. In the midst of the houses which had been burned down were drunken sailors, holding bottles of wine under their arms, while they pillaged, sacked, and turned out everything. In one of the streets, the Burgomaster of Waesmunster stopped us and, thanks to his protestations, obtained the liberation of the inhabitants of his commune. I saw an officer dressed as a Belgian and asked him to intervene in my favour, pleading that I was a civilian. The Belgian officer immediately spoke to the Commander of the convoy, who replied in excellent French:

— "We have received orders to arrest the civilians in the districts where our troops have been fired on. If I gave this man his liberty, he would be arrested again before he had gone five hundred yards. Come and speak to me at Schaerbeck and I will see." At 7 o'clock in the evening, we were taken to the station, counted, given a plate of soup, and then huddled into cattle trucks, upon which was a thick layer of manure. In each truck were thirty-six Belgians and four Bavarian soldiers. We then started in a broken-winded train! It advanced slowly, puffing, whistling, and stopping every minute. Very soon our keepers began to talk to us. They showed us their blue and white cockades proudly.

"Queen Elisabeth is Bavarian, too," they said. "She is a noble woman and will be an example for the Belgians. We admire her and respect her."

In other ways, too, they expressed their sympathy with the Belgian nation. Taking advantage of all this I asked one of them to open the door, so that we could have a last look at our country. He consented and, whilst my eyes were fixed on the pasture ground

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full of cattle, the golden harvest fields, with red-roofed farms here and there, looking so gay and cheerful under the setting sun, I, crouching down on the manure, in the warm, infected atmosphere, with insects worrying us, made a fresh plan of escape. ✓

Presently all was silent and the Bavarians were dozing. Outside there were no troops in sight. Sentinels posted from one half-mile to another kept watch over the railway line. We were within sight of Zellick and there was the race-course. It seemed to be a propitious moment. I opened the door cautiously and prepared to jump out. Just then a voice called out: "What fool has opened the door, letting in the cold?"

The four Bavarians sprang to their feet, cursing and swearing. They distributed a few blows among us with the butt ends of their guns. Our train passed through Brussels, creeping along like a tortoise and, at five in the afternoon, reached Liège.

Our arrival was announced, and the population, massed around the station and in the neighbouring streets, cheered us and threw us bread, chocolate, tobacco, and other things and called out, "Is Antwerp taken?" On our reply in the affirmative, they groaned: "Oh, God, what a misfortune!"

It can readily be imagined how thankful we were for the food thrown to us. Since the day before, we had had nothing to eat or to drink. Our hunger touched the Bavarians who allowed us to get down on the line and pick up the gifts strewn all about. For the men of our truck, we had a loaf weighing about two pounds, a tablet of chocolate, and four bottles of wine. All this divided by thirty-six did not allow of big portions, but the sight of the courageous Liégeois city and the

cordial welcome of its inhabitants had comforted us. After the meal, when two cigarettes each were allotted to us, we felt as though we had just had a king's feast. A little emboldened, I went up to a German officer who had a kindly look and introduced myself to him as an inoffensive pastry cook of Brussels, who had gone to Flanders to buy butter more cheaply, and was a victim of a frightful mistake. I was eloquent and persuasive in my arguments. "You are free," the officer said at last; "ask for a ticket for Brussels."

Intoxicated with joy, I rushed to the office of the military superintendent of the station. He was a big fellow, with a head like a bull-dog's. He did not trouble to listen, but gave me a blow with his fist on my head, another on the back of my neck, and hastened my departure from his office by a formidable kick.

On leaving Liège, we had to travel in absolute darkness. At Herbesthal, a dummy hanging from a stake, and dressed up in the full military dress of a Belgian artilleryman, caused laughter, in which our Bavarian keepers joined. Without stopping, we continued our way as far as Dusselheite. In a shed near the station, we were allowed to wash. It is impossible to give an idea of our filth. Our faces were smudged with dirt and filth of all kinds, our hair was tangled and full of straw, our clothes were dirty. Each one of us, looking at his neighbour, said to himself: "What a dirty creature!" Thanks to some soap and water, after brushing and scraping ourselves, we once more looked like human beings. We drank a bowl of soup, devoured three sausages, and set off once more on our way. We passed by stations, went

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over bridges, level crossings, and under tunnels. Frequently we met trains filled with German soldiers, who shook their fists and shouted their insults.

We did not reply, but our eyes spoke for us and our hatred could be read in them. Our apparently interminable journey came to an end finally and, on October 16th, at 11 o'clock at night, after sixty-four hours of travelling, we arrived at Soltau. At the station, we were divided into two groups, soldiers and civilians, and were sent to the riding-school. We had to pass through a crowd more curious than hostile. When we reached the building, a sub-officer, with the word "Gibraltar" on his uniform, told us to go in. We entered and found it full. Without being disturbed in the least, "Gibraltar" struck out right and left, yelling: "Here, there's room enough here for a pig." We lay down on the ground and slept like brutes.

The next day, I discovered that the circus contained 1400 civilian prisoners, of ages varying from eight to eighty-four. Among them were the Catholic priests of Lebbeke and of Sommeleuze, the chaplain of the Termonde Orphanage, the notary of —, Abbé Bilaers, etc. All the ecclesiastics had been compelled to dress as laymen, as the sight of the cassock excited the soldiers' anger. They drove the priests along with their bayonets, shouting: "Dogs, pigs, you pray in church and you shoot in the street!" With the exception of "Gibraltar," the soldiers on guard did not ill-treat us. They shouted, swore, and threatened, but they rarely struck any of us. Very strict rules were imposed on us and any infraction was punished by prison or by the stake. This latter punishment consisted of fastening the guilty man to one of the

upright pillars of the circus. He had to stand there for twelve hours, and this was excessively painful. As for our food, we had coffee in the morning, soup at noon, and in the evening, and every third day a loaf of bread of 1500 grammes. This alimentation was wholesome, but insufficient. As I had a little money, I was able to get some extra food, but those of my companions who had used up their money were reduced to devouring the scraps that their keepers left them. It was a heartrending sight to see rich, educated men, who held high posts in our country, seizing the tins containing the leavings of the German soldiers and eating these scraps gladly.

Our number decreased, as the children under fourteen were sent back to Brussels and the ecclesiastics to Selb. Finally, on the 26th of October, all the remaining prisoners were sent to the camp at Soltau.

Situated in the midst of the Lunebourg fir-tree woods, this camp looked very cheerful. The installations occupied a vast space and consisted of 96 wooden sheds, 150 yards long, and 12 wide, covered with bituminated pasteboard and provided with electricity and central heating. Each shed, beside the work-rooms and baths, had six dormitories, all built alike. On the floor, which was raised saddle-back fashion, were straw sacks filled with vegetal fibre, which generally harbours vermin in quantities. Against the outer wall were shelves, upon which each man could keep his clothes and toilette affairs. The discipline was strict, the food wholesome and scanty, and work obligatory. Seated on benches, we spent our days plaiting straw bags. Our fingers were numb with cold, as the central heating apparatus was never used. My hands were stiff and rigid with rheumatism,

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and very soon I could do no more work. I sat there for long, weary hours idle, gazing out blankly, thinking of my wife and children, and of my country, that I should probably never see again.

On the 10th of January, the Flemish were separated from the Walloons, and on the 25th of the same month we were told, to our delight, that the Flemish were to be sent back to their country. Our joy can be imagined. We began shouting and dancing and then, suddenly ashamed of ourselves, we were silent. Our unfortunate Walloon companions were weeping bitter tears. We endeavoured to encourage them, we assured them that they would soon be freed and, in their presence, we hid our joy as much as possible. Whatever may have been our social differences, and our differences of opinion, the suffering we had endured together had created a strong bond of friendship between us, and it was with a pang at our hearts that we left them when the time came to start.

We were 2800 in number and we left on the 28th, at ten in the morning. We reached Schaerbeek on the 29th, at nine in the evening, and were set free on the 30th of January, at eleven in the morning.

I rushed off immediately, in the direction of my home. Joyful, and with a light heart, I hurried along the familiar streets. As I arrived nearer and nearer, my eyes became dim and my legs felt as though they would give way. When once I saw the house, with its shop window full of tempting cakes, just as when I had left it, my heart seemed to give a bound within my breast and I suddenly felt weak and had to lean against the wall. What joy it was to see my dear wife and children once more.

Alas, the joy was not of long duration. I could

not forget that our country was in danger, and I could not desert the brave comrades who were doing glorious deeds on the banks of the Yser.

In spite of the entreaties of my wife and the tears of my children, I made my way, a few days later, to the frontier and rejoined the army.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Last Fragments of Antwerp

BY ARTILLERY CAPTAIN M—— C——

The Retreat

WE were approaching the frontier ——

Behind those trees, five hundred yards away, was Holland, the boundary of our country. To cross that frontier meant the end for the time being of our resistance. . . . What would be done with us there? Would they—? Ah no, at that idea, my whole soul revolted and strengthened me against the force of things. Cross that frontier? Never! And once more the idea which had come into my mind, and taken possession of me ever since leaving Antwerp, became imperious: "Join the King once more or—die." Good, this time I felt ready to risk everything.

Confusion reigned supreme. Everything seemed to be mixed up in inextricable disorder. In the narrow streets of this frontier village, men of all kinds of arms, belonging to every different unit, were gathered together *pêle-mêle*. The retreat had brought them all here together to this spot. Soldiers were looking for their chiefs, officers were looking for their troops and, whilst trying to bring some kind of order

into the chaos, they were hindered by carts and vehicles of all sorts, the drivers of which were endeavouring to make a way for themselves through the seething crowds. I had never felt, until this moment, all the horror of the defeat and the strange impotence of the army that has experienced it.

These lamentable fragments were all that remained of the Antwerp garrison. Assailed on all sides in the last redoubt of the fortified place, they had held out against the victorious enemy to the very end. The cannons, dragged along for miles by the men themselves, had been turned round and pointed backwards, on the city from which the Germans were already coming. Then the retreat had taken place, the interminable, exhausting retreat, when, in order to avoid being surrounded, we had marched, without halt, in the dust and heat of the sun, half dead with hunger and parched with thirst, the enemy harassing our flanks and threatening to cut us off all the time.

At present, we were here, at the frontier, and were in the position of an army in a blind alley. The darkness came on and we were surrounded by the enemy. We had been without food for two or three days. The men were dazed and bewildered by the commotion and could no longer hear the orders they received. One of them came wandering towards me and I told him where he would find his Company. He looked at me in a dazed way. I seized him by the shoulders and pushed him in the direction of his troop. Under the impulse of the strength acquired by my push, he walked a few steps and then rolled into a ditch, and remained there stretched out as though lifeless.

Vague rumours were circulating, discouraging,

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gloomy news. Some of our troops had gone over into Holland and we were going to follow them, as our retreat was cut off and the enemy quite near. . . . In the midst of the darkness, firing rent the air. I prepared immediately for parrying an attack, as I found myself in the rear-guard.

Suddenly, I heard a dull, prolonged sound in the village. I sent a messenger and went myself to the out-posts. Quartermaster Snysters, a volunteer, though quite an elderly man, addressed me: "Lieutenant," he said, with an anxious look on his face, "is it true that we are going over into Holland?"

"My dear fellow, we shall not go over into Holland unless we want to," I answered. "Are we both of the same mind?"

"Ah, good! As for me, you know——"

He finished with an energetic gesture which required no words.

"Where are the others?" I asked.

The others were a few brave sub-officers, who, with my friend Snysters, had promised to follow me whatever happened, through everything, through the enemy, through death itself, if necessary. They were all there, awaiting me.

"My friends," I said, "things seem to be in a bad way. The moment has come to prove your mettle. Are you all of the same mind still?"

"Lieutenant," said big Van Bastelaer, "we are ready for everything—except to be prisoners."

"Good," I answered.

My messenger had not come back though. The sound I had heard in the village seemed farther off and everything appeared to be calm. I went to see for myself and found perfect silence in the dark street.

There was not a man to be seen. What was happening? Presently, in the deserted Square of the little village, I saw a little group of soldiers appear and, at the head of it, I recognised Major S——.

"Is that you M——?" he called out, and then, in a lower tone, he added, "They have crossed the frontier, we are alone. . . . Have you any men?"

"Yes, Major, I am holding the outposts."

"Bring your men to the Square at once."

"My friends," said the Major, speaking very gravely, when we were all assembled there, "we are surrounded by big forces. There is nothing left but to cross the frontier and go into Holland. Those who do not wish to go with me are free."

"Good, Major," I answered, approaching him. "I will go with you to the frontier, but not beyond it."

The Major looked angry, but he restrained himself.

"What do you propose doing?" he asked.

"I intend getting through the German lines or dying in the attempt."

"But it is pure madness."

"I do not care to give up my sword, Major, as long as I can use it."

He reflected for a minute and then held out his hand. "Good," he said, "you are free. Adieu!"

Four men then left the ranks. They were my four friends, who all preferred a glorious death to servitude.

"Attention! Right flank! Right! Forward—March!"

Silently and with dragging footsteps, the troop set out and was soon at some distance. It then disappeared in the darkness.

The thing was done and we were alone, separated

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from our army by streams of enemies, against whom we had to fling ourselves, and either pass or die in the attempt. Courage! The moment had come for us to prove our filial love for our beloved country! We were not conquered, we four, and in spite of the disaster hovering over us, in spite of Death, which we expected awaited us over yonder, we felt our hearts full of joy, hope, and pride. . . .

In the German Lines

Before setting out, we held council together for a few minutes. The German lines now reached from St. Nicolas to the frontier. In a movement as rapid as theirs had been, it was very probable that they had left gaps between these two points, and we had to try to pass through these gaps. I took the direction and we set out. I made the sign of the cross and committed my soul and the souls of my companions to the God of Justice. We each had a good gun, a bayonet, and our pockets full of cartridges. We set off across the fields in the darkness.

After walking about fifty yards, I was compelled to come to a standstill. The nervous tension which had kept me up whilst with the troop had suddenly given way and, suddenly, the fatigue of the preceding days seemed to come upon me and stiffen all my limbs. I felt giddy and the whole country seemed to be turning round and round. I fell to the ground, and my whole body seemed to be seized with an immense weariness. I dare not give way to it, as it was necessary to move on.

"Forward!" I said to myself, "for the King's sake!"

Presently we came to a cross-roads and it seemed to us as though something had moved behind the hedge. One of us crawled towards the spot and made a sign to the others that it was nothing. The wind had probably stirred one of the branches. We walked on and on, straight in front of us, across the immense polder, jumping over ditches full of water, and stumbling over the turnips in the field, for we passed through one after another of these turnip fields. I tore up a beet-root and ate it greedily as I walked along.

In the distance, we saw a group of houses standing out vaguely against the horizon. This was probably the dyke which forms a passage over the water. If this dyke should be guarded, which was very probable, we should have to look to ourselves. As we approached, we saw that the houses were lighted up. Peasants would not have lights at that hour. I crept along stealthily to one of the windows and gazed eagerly through a crack in the shutters. There was a room full of Boches in grey coats, some of them snoring and the others talking.

We slipped round towards the entrance to the dyke. At the bend was a sentinel, motionless. I rubbed my chin and thought things over. If we went along by the water, keeping at the bottom of the embankment, there must surely be a way of crossing, if there were not a second sentinel. Holding our breath and watching every shrub, we crept slowly along. We came to the end of the dyke and had met no one.

This then was the first obstacle cleared without any difficulty. Our prayer was that Heaven would protect the slumber of the Boches!

We were now once more in the endless desert,

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stumbling along in the furrows, eating turnips, crossing fields, our gaze searching for landmarks, which always seemed to draw farther away as we approached. Our minds were occupied with a vision of our army, that army which needed our arms and which had conquered our hearts.

Soon we came to a little hamlet. There were no lights and, if the Germans were not there, we thought we might be able to take shelter during the day. We approached a courtyard and there we saw some weapons. In the sheds, we heard sonorous snores. We went on very quietly, but we were glad to see how badly the Prussians kept guard. If only they had known that five well-armed Belgians were having a look round their quarters!

We continued our way and had now to go through meadows with hedges and barriers of barbed wire. Here and there were solitary houses. We came to one with a light in the window. We went some distance round in order to avoid it. Suddenly, big Jeanjean, who was ahead of us, called out:

"This way, Lieutenant, there is a good path here."

He had scarcely finished speaking when I heard a tremendous splash and the sound of a body struggling in the water. The unfortunate man had taken one of those moss-covered canals, which intersect the district, for a dry path, and had hurried forward with an eagerness worthy of a better reward. A shot was heard almost immediately. Jeanjean freed himself and came out of his bath, but bullets whizzed by our ears, as we had been discovered.

We crawled along by the wretched ditch, and we jumped over another one, and then hurried along

under the hedges like hunted foxes, but we were followed all the time by bullets.

In front of us, at the end of a field, I saw a row of houses, but we had to be cautious, for the building on the right was the house with a light that we had been avoiding. To the left were more houses, and above them emerged a church steeple. It was a village, then, and we knew it must be St.-Gilles-Waes, which was full of Germans. I noticed a huge patch of big cabbages. We crept quickly to them and then, crouching down amongst the leaves, with our fingers on the triggers of our guns, we awaited events.

The firing gradually ceased, as the Boches had evidently lost track of us. It was necessary for us to get away from there, though, before daybreak and it was high time to start.

We came quietly out of our hiding-place, fifty yards from a sentinel, whose back was turned towards us. We had to keep quite close to the walls of farms which were swarming with the enemy. On passing in front of the house with the light, I saw a figure lean out of the window, and then the light was extinguished. The village behind us became animated and the pursuit commenced.

A hundred yards in front of us, a group of men suddenly appeared at the turn of the road. It was a patrol. We crept down an embankment and then slipped, one after the other, into a little ditch which was covered by the branches of filbert trees. The patrol passed by and disappeared.

The hour was advancing though, and day began to break. Our poor Jeanjean was shivering all over. We could not possibly think of spending the whole day like this. I saw a house, which looked very

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peaceful, outside the village. Perhaps it was empty. We decided to go and find out. Under the shelter of ditches and hedges, we arrived at the back of the house. In the courtyard there were guns and bags lying about. This was ominous, but our enterprising Van Bastelaer had already crossed the fence and was quite near to it.

"Lieutenant," he said, "they are Belgian haversacks."

We hesitated a moment, and then all five of us entered the courtyard. Some of us searched the bags, whilst the others began to explore the house. I went to have a lookout from the little lane that led into the road. At the other end of it, ten yards away from me, I saw a motor-car and by it . . . a German officer!

Just as I was looking at him, he turned round facing me, and our eyes met. I went back to my men, but the Boche followed me. We were only three steps away from each other, looking into each other's eyes. With a quick gesture, he drew out his pistol and took aim. I unsheathed my sword and held its point under his nose. I shall never forget what I then saw. The Prussian officer turned deadly pale. Like a flash of lightning, I saw a look of unutterable terror pass over his face and then suddenly, before I had time to strike, this man, who had held my life in his hands, turned on his heels and disappeared in the lane.

But at the same moment there was a general stir in the barns near by. Heads looked out from everywhere. This time, it was going to be a tough business. Without waiting for our change, we all sprang over the palisadings. The first one caught his foot and fell, the next one fell on him, and all five of us rolled one

over the other into the ditch, laughing in a way that must have made all the Boches in the farm wild with fury.

Facing us was an immense, open space, as flat as a glacié. There was nothing for it but to cross this. We started at full speed, but it was over ploughed land.

"I fancy this stroke of business will be the end of us!" said Snysters, gasping for breath.

"Yes," replied Jeanjean, who was breathing like a seal.

"It'll be good for your cold!" shouted little Gilissen, who was acting as our rear-guard. And all five of us, keeping up our speed, laughed heartily.

Presently we came to a road. Jeanjean rushed a little way towards us, then stopped short and muttered: "Attention, Lieutenant!" I looked and saw a German sentinel, leaning on his weapon, stationed at a little building some five yards away from us. There was no time to manoeuvre; I turned to my men and, whilst running, shouted out to them "Es geht wohl! Kommen Sie hierdurch!"

We crossed the road under his very nose and rushed into a little wood which skirted the opposite side. The sentinel did not move, deceived probably, thanks to the dim light, to my words, and to the audacity of our manoeuvre.

To our joy, at the other end of the wood, we saw a dark line stretching out towards us. It was the labyrinth of fir-trees, of tall broom and brushwood, which skirts the northern part of the country. We crossed a glade, and then a clearing and a railroad. The enemy post there had not time to stop us. There was another wood and then, at last, we were in the

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thicket. Behind us, we gradually heard less and less noise, and the firing was farther off and at longer intervals. Still running, we described a series of zigzags and curves, leaving behind us ditches, clearings, and glades. . . . Finally, in the midst of a patch of young fir-trees, I fell down. I could not have got up again though for anything. The others stretched themselves out near me and we all lay there, like so many dead men, in the wet grass.

The day broke, a fine rain fell persistently, wetting us through to the skin. We were shivering in every limb. Jeanjean coughed, snored, and talked in his sleep. The two Flemish men joked, swore, and insulted each other, each treating the other as a coward. . . . Gilissen, the little Liége "*rossai*," was the only one who kept silence. He was trying, conscientiously, to sleep with one eye and to take stock of our surroundings with the other one. I reminded him of that time when he had been on observation for the Barchon Fort and had remained for forty-eight hours perched up on his steeple, surrounded by Germans, and had come back to the Fort with all the material of the observation post.

Jeanjean, who certainly did not appear able to sleep well, now felt it his duty to compose the *menu*. "Anchovies," he said, "salmon trout, stuffed chicken, cream cakes," and I do not know what beside. I found half a turnip in my pocket, Gilissen had three sweetmeats, and the ground near us was strewn with acorns. We were all right, and could certainly sustain a regular siege!

I looked at my map, a Touring Club map, which was the only one I had. To my horror, I discovered that all the incidents of the night, and the various

turns we had been obliged to make, had made us describe an immense semicircle and that, at that moment, we were less than a mile from the frontier and surrounded on all sides by Germans.

In the wood, the firing began again. We heard it in the distance and then nearer to us. It was an organised search. Presently, this pursuit made us a little anxious, for the bullets broke some branches near us. We were obliged to leave our shelter and we went along under cover of a deep ditch. At the end of this we came out and found ourselves—ten yards away from a group of Prussians. We rushed into a thicket and the hunt began again.

Presently there was a fresh respite for us, as quite suddenly some quick firing was heard near by in a southerly direction. It sounded like an engagement and we wondered what it could be. Perhaps it was a Belgian troop, trying, like us, to get free. Extraordinary as this supposition was, it was the only one that seemed probable. In case we were right, it was our duty to endeavour to join it, at any cost, and work together. Perhaps our unexpected intervention, insignificant though it should be, might be sufficient to decide the issue of the fight. We moved on and had scarcely gone two hundred yards, when we saw a group of peasants coming out of a glade. They looked terrified. We questioned them and found out that the Boches were firing on the houses in the village, under the pretext that the inhabitants had hidden some Belgian soldiers. The brutes! Instinctively, I moved forwards, but the bullets whizzed by, quite close to our ears. This time, they came from every side. On the left, on the right, the Germans were everywhere, the whole place swarmed with them,

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like a veritable ant-heap. From thicket to thicket, from ditch to ditch, we struggled along in order to avoid being surrounded. But, alas, we were going backwards and behind us was the frontier! Finally, we reached it. There was the line and that open view beyond—a hundred yards away from us was Holland! It was the only side on which Death would not mow us down. Snysters swore like a demon. We took counsel together in whispers. There were three things open to us. First, we might give ourselves up to the Germans, but we had no idea of doing that. Secondly, we might let them kill us here, on the last little corner of our native land. This was tempting, but we could not rejoin our army if we decided on it. There was one other alternative, and that was to keep close to the frontier and continue our way, endeavouring to escape the German pursuit and the Dutch sentry. This seemed to us the wisest plan of the three. We soon cleared the hundred yards. There was an iron milestone at the corner of a wood. A few steps and then we were in Holland.

Prisoners

The enemy from henceforth was the sentry, whom we had to avoid in order to continue our way. We started along a sandy road in the midst of a thick fir-wood. We had not gone a hundred yards, when we found ourselves in front of a tall Dutch Sergeant, who made a sign for us to stop. I looked all round just as a hunted beast does. In the clearing, out of which the sub-officer had stepped, I saw a multitude of soldiers, with orange-coloured stripes, walking along a road, together with civilians.

"Hang it," I said to myself, "we are in a neutral country and are bound to be polite."

I entered into conversation with the Dutchman. I endeavoured to make him understand that everyone is liable to make a mistake in the road. I apologised and, moving back, assured him that we would recross the frontier by the shortest cut possible. This did not meet with his approval, though, at all, and the great lanky fellow smiled amiably in reply to my speech and invited us, very calmly, to accompany him. We had nothing left but to obey, as we were already surrounded by soldiers, and they looked devilishly in earnest. I hid my sword under a bush and I took off my officer's insignia, to spare it shame, and in order to be less noticed myself.

When we were at the police station, we threw our guns down on a heap of plunder and then we were led away.

Disarmed and prisoners! Ah, there was no more laughing now! My four wolves, transformed against their will into lambs, were furious, and ready to gnaw their own fists. As for me, I felt myself degraded and I could have wept with shame and rage. I thought I could read in the eyes of the people, who were watching us pass by, a smile of pity and of contempt, and I was grief stricken at having exposed our uniform to such dishonour. Ah, how I regretted having crossed the fatal line! How stupid of us to have let ourselves be caught like this! Not one of us uttered a word. We did not reply to the questions we were asked. We were like feline animals, caught in a trap, looking furtively for any way of escape. It was a fixed idea with us to get back to Belgium, and we felt that we must be back there the following day.

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We were put with a convoy of prisoners. How shall I describe the painful journey of that lamentable herd of men! Oh, the humiliation of that procession of soldiers without arms! On turning a street, we made off, but we were brought back. At Terneuzen, we made a second attempt to escape. Together with another comrade, who was ready to make common cause with us, we tried to get some civilian clothes. It was useless. The ready-made-clothes shops were shut and no one would supply us with any. In desperation, I placed my men in two ranks, put on my officer's insignia again, and we marched quietly towards the gate of the town. We were stopped on the way by the sentry.

"Where are you going?" we were asked.

"To Sas-de-Gand."

"What for?"

"To fetch some teams for the ambulance carriages."

"Who sent you?"

"The officer at the bridge."

Our questioner did not look thoroughly convinced.

"Forward—March!"

We did not need telling a second time. At the boundary postern, we were questioned again. As we put on a calm, assured manner and were very gruff, our stratagem succeeded again. We were now on the Selzaete main road, and in two hours we should be on Belgian soil, if all continued satisfactorily. Our feet now seemed to have wings. Half way, alas, we came across another sentry-box and here a telephonic message had been received with regard to our escape. In this land of canals and dykes, things are easy for the authorities. We were arrested and taken back to Terneuzen, between two rows of soldiers with drawn

bayonets. This fresh attempt made things bad for us, and we were now considered dangerous individuals, put on to a boat, and carefully guarded. We were then sent off by water, with a group of prisoners, to an unknown destination.

It was dark and I was lying down on the bridge, although it was icy cold, looking at the stars, whilst on the coast the Quays seemed to be flying behind us. We had been sailing along for some time, and I supposed we were now in front of Flushing. There were more canals, which seemed to intersect each other endlessly. I wondered where we were going, and all night long we went on and on.

In the morning the boat stopped. On the Quay, the crowd hurried towards us and threw us bread and fruit. There was great confusion, shouting, and a regular tumult. This was the moment for us. We stepped over the netting, jumped on to the Quay, and hid ourselves in some enormous packing cases filled with manure, which were standing near. We had not been seen, so that all seemed right. The towing-boat whistled for the departure, but, unfortunately, we were too well known. Our absence was noticed, and we were once more discovered and taken on board.

For hours we continued on the water, in the immense arms of the sea and we did not stop anywhere on our way. Water, water everywhere! How should we ever escape? The first thing for us to do, evidently, was to procure some civilian clothes. On the boat, certain prisoners were already dressed as ordinary citizens. We talked to some of them quietly, and offered to exchange our uniforms for their garments.

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Very soon, we were wearing the finest dockers' suits imaginable. We could not help laughing to see what ruffians we looked in this fresh disguise. Snysters looked like a regular hooligan, Jeanjean wore a thread-bare flannel suit, which outlined his corpulent figure admirably. Gilissen looked like a collier and I like a miserable beggar. Rolent, our new recruit, with his soft felt hat, was the one who looked the most decent. Van Bastelaer refused obstinately to take off his uniform. It was unfortunate for him, as he was not able to get away with us.

Finally, we reached Dordrecht. The convoy was allowed to land, so that the prisoners might have a meal at the barracks. After this, we were to be taken to Groningen, in Friesland, to be interned there.

"Groningen, merciful Heavens!" we said to ourselves; "we absolutely must find a way of escape from here, as this is the last good card left in our hands."

We were placed four abreast and, between two rows of soldiers, the troop set out. The streets were full of spectators, who asked the soldiers for buttons and cartridges as keepsakes. This was just the thing for us. One of us, at the turn of a street, set to work distributing so generously that a crowd collected and there was disorder, and a break in the line of the troops. That was just what we needed and, very simply, turning half round we took our place with the crowd, and watched the procession pass, like all the other good people.

Oh, liberty! In order to relish its sweetness, we must first have been deprived of it for a time! How joyfully we went along in those narrow streets where we were quite unknown! How eagerly we discussed our plans for returning to our "free" Belgium!

The Return

We had the good luck to find a courageous Belgian boatman at Dordrecht. He put us up on his boat and provided us with the wherewithal for reaching Flushing. Once there, mingling with the refugees, we had no difficulty in passing unnoticed. We were at last on our way to Belgium: boat, train, carriages, motor-car, waggons, every kind of transport did we make use of in order to hasten our return. Our determination carried us through.

Finally, we reached the frontier and our feet were on Belgian soil. Oh bliss, no words can describe the feelings we had at that moment! It was then that I understood fully what the love of one's country really is. The very air seemed purer, the ground looked different, and we knew all the odours and the grasses which grew in the ditches by the roadside. The trees welcomed us and their branches told us over again old things that we already knew, with their familiar swayings, which awoke in the bottom of our hearts all kinds of adorable and mysterious memories. Oh, that profound life in all things, how it drank in and absorbed the life of our very souls, and with what happiness this expanded and mingled again with that other life!

The soul of our country was in everything and, whilst murmuring its captivating song, with its smile both sad and gay, it seemed to take us under its wings and at the same time implore our aid.

Poor Belgium! Mother of my blood and of my life, I should have liked to kiss thy martyred ground! But what my burning kiss could not have told you then, my blood, which is thine, shall tell thee some

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day, when it waters the soil for thee, glad to fertilise the germ of thy liberty!

We walked on, happy and feverishly anxious, hurrying on with all our strength, in order to be ready for that invading stream which was on its way to our coast and which might cut us off a second time.

Finally, at Ostend, we found the very last of our columns pressed on closely by the Germans. With our columns we reached Furnes, where the King was.

No one recognised us at first, such wretched objects did we look. We were all five of us at the end of our tether. One or two of us could not walk any farther, and the others were as though dazed. But we had drawn from the struggle, with the joy of having done our duty, a force that was infinitely greater and more precious than bodily force. It was the force of the heart that loves, whose will is imperious and can accomplish what it wills, for the sake of that love!

CHAPTER XXIV

Tournai

BY GENERAL-MAJOR FRANTZ

ON our arrival at Tournai, towards the end of September, 1914, we were welcomed as the saviours of the country. Our arrival was supposed to mean the reconquering of the whole province of Hainault. The inhabitants of Tournai had already suffered by the first invasion and on seeing me, with my Staff and troops, they imagined that they were now saved. They were all the more convinced of this as some French troops arrived at the same time. Alas, these troops were composed of a Battalion of Territorials, who had never been under fire, and a Squadron of Chasseurs, also Territorials, commanded by a Captain of fifty years of age; two Squadrons of Algerian *goumiers* of all ages and tribes, who looked superb. They were cavalymen with brown faces, and were wearing their white burnous and carrying their long, slender guns in their shoulder belts. Their Sheiks, who had already fought for France, were proud of the crosses of the Legion of Honour which they wore.

These troops did not look sufficient for the defence of the town and Baron Stiénon du Pré, the Burgo-master, asked the Commander of the French troops if they would really prove an efficient protection,

or whether they would have no reinforcements and would have to leave Tournai to its fate, on the first attack.

When the Germans had made their first appearance here, Tournai had been ordered by them to pay a tax of three million francs, and whilst this sum was being found, by means of a house to house collection, the Burgomaster and several other prominent men had been taken to Ath, as hostages. From there, they were sent to Brussels and imprisoned nine days, although the sum exacted had been handed over to the enemy.

The French Commander considered the Burgomaster's question a poor kind of welcome, and I asked the latter for an explanation. He apologised amply and assured us of the absolute loyalty of himself and of all his citizens. After this, the French had no further cause for complaint with regard to their reception by the inhabitants of Tournai. The remembrance of their sufferings was, however, too recent for the prominent men not to dread a renewal of them. The evil days when they had all been living under the Prussian heel was uppermost in the thoughts of all the townspeople. We were constantly being asked by them whether the Germans had been definitely driven back, etc. . . . Unfortunately the information I received prevented my giving them an assurance of this.

For several days we lived at Tournai in constant danger of a fresh invasion. I took the precaution to have all the Civic Guard Scout Chasseurs provided afresh with arms. Their own guns were now in France and in different places in Belgium, so that instead of their Mausers they were supplied

with Gras rifles. This did not inspire them with confidence. They were absolutely lacking in initiative, but were always very willing. My principal forces consisted of about a hundred Gendarmes of the Hainault province, under Lieutenant-Colonel Bloem, of the Gendarmerie. I supplied my men and, later on, my volunteers, with fifty-seven new bicycles, which the Germans had left behind them in their sudden retreat. Thanks to these machines, I was able to send patrols out to a good distance. They managed to bring back a great deal of useful information and they succeeded in killing, or taking prisoners, a certain number of Uhlans. At the same time, we managed to convince the enemy that considerable troops were massed at Tournai and in the neighbourhood, and this illusion delayed their march forward. The famous German spying system was very defective here, and our enemies knew so little about the troops advancing on Tournai that, believing they had no time to take their wounded away with them, they had left a certain number in our hospitals. I sent them away promptly, as prisoners, to Bruges.

On the 30th of September, 1914, I learnt that enemy troops of all arms, estimated at 10,000 to 15,000 men, had reached Ath and, in the afternoon, had sent their outposts to Ligne, about half way to Leuze. We might, therefore, expect to be attacked the following day. I sent a request for help to Lieutenant-General Clooten, who provided me with about a hundred volunteers from Eecloo. Their instruction had only been rudimentary, but they were excellent men.

As we had no Artillery, I sent an urgent request to the Commander of the French Division of Douai to

come to our help, but he could not, as he was threatened on three sides at the same time. We were, therefore, reduced to Gendarmes, to Scout Chasseurs, and to the Eccloo Volunteers, with the addition of a Cyclist Corps under Lieutenant Gérard. This officer had been ordered to destroy the Thulin bridge, over the canal from Mons to Condé. Unfortunately, the Belgians were betrayed by a woman in the neighbourhood and fell into an ambush, thereby losing forty men out of the hundred and twenty of which their contingent was composed. The others fell back on Tournai. They were all daring young men, full of enthusiasm, and quite ready to undertake the most dangerous missions in the enemy's lines. I remember, among others, a soldier of the 12th Line Regiment. He had walked some miles, bringing a wounded comrade with him in a wheelbarrow.

Towards ten o'clock at night, on the 30th of September, Lieutenant Gérard had come to me and placed himself at my service. I explained to him the situation, and that very night he went and blew up several fortification works on the railway line between Ath and Leuze.

At midnight, Lieutenant Gérard came to tell me that he had been beyond Ligne and had succeeded in his daring enterprise. Thanks to this bold expedition, the first Uhlan patrols did not reach Tournai till late the following morning.

As we were threatened from the south-east as well as from the south, I was obliged to divide my poor forces in a way to bar the passage for the enemy in these two directions, and also towards the north-east, on the Tournai-Frasnes road. In the plains, my patrols of Gendarmes and Volunteers scoured the

country. My method was to send out strong patrols of twenty men, half of them Gendarmes and half Volunteers. I gave them instructions to await the patrols of enemy Cavalry, until they were only one hundred yards away, so that they could fire effectually, and not to let either a horse or its rider escape.

On the northern border of a little wood, about a mile and a half to the west of Ramecroix, to the south of the Tournai-Leuze road, a patrol of twenty men, under the orders of Captain Motry of the Gendarmerie, allowed an enemy patrol of seven men, commanded by an officer, to approach within a hundred yards. With one single volley, they then brought down all the riders with their horses. Our soldiers took the horses' bits and the overcoats of the men they had killed, in order to show me the result of their work, and made off at once, as, to the south of the wood, a second enemy patrol was on its way to the rescue of the first one. A good number of Uhlans of this fresh troop also had to eat the dust.

We could not, nevertheless, hold out against hordes twenty times, or rather fifty times, superior in numbers to ourselves. Towards mid-day, the French beat a retreat in the midst of the exodus of the unfortunate inhabitants of the town. At Orcq, I showed the Major in command a magnificent place from which he could sweep the whole country right up to the entrance to Tournai. He took up position there, but soon after received orders to continue the retreat towards the west, that is towards Lille.

The French had left behind them, at the St. Jean Barracks, all that would have impeded their retreat: wounded and sick, horses, luggage, etc.

Before leaving Tournai, it occurred to me to go and

see what had become of this convoy. It was a fortunate thing that I did so, as no one had any idea of the immediate danger. I had only just time to give orders to the senior Quartermaster to collect all, men, horses, and baggage, and to set out for the Tournai-Lille road, where they would find the French troops. At the same time, I told my patrols to guard all the roads out, in order to allow the *goumiers* and mounted Chasseurs to keep their retreat line in the direction of Lille. They were all saved!

With my Staff, I took up quarters in the Froyennes Convent, on the Tournai-Courtrai, road where, thanks to a telephone, I could communicate with the various Gendarmerie posts. The Brothers of the Christian Doctrine, who were nearly all French, received us with open arms and, in spite of our protestations, while we were getting information and I was giving orders, they prepared a meal for us and looked after us generally.

They had transformed their convent into a hospital and, unfortunately, all their trouble only served for the Boche wounded, as I received strict orders, in case the French left Tournai, to beat a retreat in the direction of Courtrai and to organise the defence of the Espierres canal.

I started at once and arrived at Espierres on Thursday, October 1st. I saw at once that all the drawbridges of the canal opened on the south side, that is on the enemy's side, and that it was impossible to change them and make the bridges work on our side, that is on the north side. This was most unfortunate, and is another proof how little we had thought of going to war. I quartered my Staff at Dottignies and took measures for guarding the various points

where it was possible to cross the canal between the village of Espierres (Escaut) and the Herseaux-Tournai railway. This compelled me to spread out my men and so divide my poor forces, on account of the number of bridges. For the next three days we were in contact with the enemy. We drove back patrols and took prisoners. My young Volunteers were under fire for the first time, but they were so brave and so eager to fight that, on the second day, I made seven soldiers Corporals for their conduct before the enemy. This encouraged the others, as they all wanted to distinguish themselves.

On Saturday, October 3rd, at dusk, the enemy, after being driven back three times, came again in force and drove back two of my posts at the extreme right. On another side, the enemy advanced by Herseaux and Estampuis. I was in this way turned on my right and, at the same time, wedged in at Espierres. I had only just time to constitute a strong flank-guard of Gendarmes and Cyclist Volunteers to oppose the enveloping movement and beat a retreat in the direction of Courtrai. We were being pursued all the time and our march was difficult, on account of the darkness. I stopped a local tramcar coming from Courtrai and put the Tournai Civic Guards into it. These men had no notion of a fighting retreat. Half way from Courtrai, I met the East Flanders Gendarmes coming to our aid and, under their protection, we reached Courtrai.

At the roll-call of my soldiers, I saw that three of my Volunteers were missing. I thought they were either dead, wounded, or prisoners. Not at all. These three brave men had performed the following exploit. On Sunday morning, October 4th, two of these missing

men arrived at Courtrai, carrying the saddles of two Uhlans with all accessories. They had carried this weight, about 80 lbs. each, from Espierres, through the enemy's lines, a distance of about twelve miles. When we questioned them, they replied that they knew we were beating a retreat towards Courtrai, but they each wanted to "have their Prussian" before rallying. They had been pursued by the Uhlans along the canal bank. They had crossed the muddy Espierres brook, which runs parallel with the canal, on a plank of wood. The Uhlans had attempted to do the same thing, but had sunk in the mud. Our soldiers had killed them and had dragged the horses out and taken the saddles, in order to prove to us that they had attained their object. The third missing soldier brought back to Courtrai a horse, fully equipped, after having killed its rider. He had come back quite alone with his plunder. We thought these feats superb, considering that they had all three come through an invaded district.

CHAPTER XXV

Dixmude

**FROM AN ACCOUNT GIVEN BY ERNEST COLLIN, A PRIVATE OF THE
12TH LINE REGIMENT, AND COMPLETED BY ERNEST JOB,
A CORPORAL IN THE SAME REGIMENT**

As soon as the enemy began to attack the Forts with an Artillery so powerful that no permanent fortifications could resist, the Staff realised that Antwerp was lost, and that all efforts must be made to save the fighting army.

The retreat began in the evening of the 6th of October. It was admirably organised, but it meant excessive and inevitable fatigue for the troops. The 3rd Division, which covered the most exposed flank of the army, had the hardest task, as it was compelled to make continual night marches, without any rest whatever.

From Antwerp to Ghent, our Battalion had to march all the time and our difficulties were increased by the combats we had to wage at Lokeren and at Oostacker. On their arrival at Tronchiennes, on the 9th of October, our men were thoroughly exhausted. The following day, at five in the morning, the 12th Line Regiment and the greater part of the 3rd Division were sent by train to Nieuport, where they arrived in the afternoon. The exhaustion of the soldiers was

so great that it was necessary to give them two or three days' rest. On the 13th we set off once more, and on the 14th we took up our position along the Yser. It was a very good line of defence, reaching from the North Sea at Boesinghe, along the river as far as Knocke and, beyond that town, following the Yperlée canal.¹ From Nieuport-Bains to Boesinghe, the line measured about 22 miles, an extent not at all out of proportion to the strength of the Belgian army, which was then reduced to 82,000 men with 48,000 guns. The whole country is interspersed with ditches, canals, and rivers, and the supreme resource was that, at Nieuport, we had a dyke system which allowed us to inundate the country where German forces might be too strong.

At daybreak, on the 15th of October, we were at work. We made trenches at Leke, Pervyse, and Oudecapelle and we were lodged, more or less comfortably, in sheds and barns. The trenches and the movements of the troops gave us plenty to think about. In the distance, the cannon was roaring, and its sullen voice came nearer and nearer every minute. What was going to happen? All kinds of conjectures came into the minds of the soldiers. For the last two days, they had had no bread, but, fortunately, there were biscuits to appease their hunger. Some French bread was then distributed, but, although it was good, it did not take the place of the national brown bread. In a deserted farm, a few dainty-lovers massacred some poor pigs. When they had caught one, in a few seconds it was slaughtered, dressed, and cut up, and then each man went off with his share.

¹ *The Campaign of the Belgian Army.*

On the 19th, the 12th Line Regiment had orders to occupy Dixmude. Up to that date, this town had been defended by a Brigade of Marine Fusiliers, who had opened fire on the morning of the 16th, in order to drive back a strong body of enemy reconnaissances.

According to the orders communicated to us, the Brigade B, which comprised the 11th and 12th, as well as a group of Artillery, was placed at the disposal of the French Admiral Ronarc'h, to whom the defence of the Dixmude bridge-head had been entrusted.

The Admiral gave orders to the Brigade B to hold the bridge-head on the right bank of the Yser, whilst his sailors, attached to the Belgian 5th Division, would execute an offensive in a northerly direction.

Our immediate Chiefs were Colonel Jacques, commanding the 12th Regiment, and Colonel Meiser, commanding the Brigade. I have mentioned the names of these courageous officers, as it will be understood that, led by such men, the troops had confidence and it was certain that the soldiers would all do their duty. We were absolutely responsible for the defence of the Yser. The King had appealed to us, asking us to hold this line for the next forty-eight hours, although it was probable that the Germans would do their utmost to pierce it. We had all given our word to die rather than to yield this last shred of our territory.

On the 19th of October, which was a bright, sunshiny day, the Regiment was assembled at Oudecapelle. We were fully aware that serious things were taking place, but the Colonel, with a smile, announced a great victory. We strapped up our kits gaily and set off, thinking of our return to reconquered Liège.

We gradually approached our poor, unfortunate

Dixmude. When we entered the town, we were surrounded by an anxious, but sympathetic population. Very many refugees were already on the way towards more favoured countries. These poor people, flying from the invaded towns and villages, had been wandering aimlessly day and night, in search of a safe and hospitable district. On seeing them, I was seized with fury against our relentless enemy, and I thought of my own family and of all those I loved, whom I should, perhaps, never see again.

We passed through the town and took up our position in the trenches, which had been quickly prepared in front of the bridge-head. There was no doubt but that we were going to fight again. And what a fight it would be! The fate of the Allies depended on our resisting to the uttermost. If the enemy crossed, we were conquered. With the most determined resolution, we began to improve our position. The Marine Fusiliers had only done the rough part of digging out the trenches. There was no accessory defence whatever, no wire, and nothing demolished, so that our defence would be infinitely more difficult. Beside this, certain trenches had been established against the coverts. The first thing to do was to complete the trenches and to clear the firing range within the near zone. We set to work energetically. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. My friend Job was at work fortifying the parapet of our shelter, and I was a little ahead of him clearing away whatever obstructed the outlook. Suddenly, I heard a whizzing sound and a shell destroyed the trench. Several more followed and I was knocked down. I got up again and ran to shelter. The shells showered down, and all kinds of *débris* were blown up in the air.

I looked round for Job and, just at this moment, a projectile fell straight on to his parapet, which crumbled away, burying him under it. This was a terrible moment of anxiety, but he managed to extricate himself and, with a very red face, escaped to another trench. The bombardment continued and, at the end of an hour, the firing took a longer range and projectiles burst on the town itself. It took us a little time to recover. We then went back to our holes, or rather we had to make fresh ones, as nothing remained but a heap of rubbish, and I could neither find my arms nor my kit. I was obliged to take those of a wounded man near.

At six o'clock in the evening, we were informed that the 5th Army Division, together with the Marine Fusiliers, was to cross the Yser and pass to the left bank. The troops in position were to protect this retreat. The night was fairly tranquil and it was raining even in the trenches. The soldiers were dozing, with their arms ready in case of an attack. Each man was his own sentinel in these inconvenient holes. Finally, after long hours of anguish and of anxiety, the darkness was over and the dawn comforted us. We were very weary and we hoped to have a little rest. Alas, the enemy was advancing and threatening us again. At eight o'clock, on the 20th of October, the bombardment commenced. It was an incessant shower of big shrapnels and of mine shells, a sort of torpedo shell, which burst with a deafening noise and an opaque smoke. The moral effect was immense, although the material damage was not very great. Job and I were lying face downwards against the parapet, helpless and dazed, expecting to be killed every second.

For long hours, that seemed like centuries, we heard these fatal whizzings, these formidable explosions, and saw our men lying still like so many wax-work figures. No one moved, no one spoke and no one could eat anything. Only the sound of heavy breathing broke the silence of the trenches. And this torture endured until two in the afternoon. Suddenly, our advance sentinels signalled the arrival of Germans in masses. The bombardment was the prelude to an Infantry attack, which began at half-past two in the afternoon. The Artillery firing took longer aim, in order to reach points behind our line. Dixmude was bombarded to the uttermost, in order to prevent the arrival of reserves to our trenches. In the German lines, a ceaseless Infantry firing then took place and the lines gradually advanced. The enemy made use of the ground and the numerous coverts in the district, as the firing zone had not been cleared to any great extent. The enemy troops did not reach the assault position, as the firing of our men caused them considerable losses.

At this moment, my platoon Chief sent me to ask the Captain for some information. I crawled away, but on my return I found my Chief wounded. I wanted to take him away, but the Captain insisted on my returning to the trench. Our cannons were being directed on to a wood from which the enemy was coming. The battle was engaged and we were all possessed with the fever of war and were shooting from everywhere. Dixmude was buried under showers of shells and shrapnels. The Germans appeared rapidly on all sides. We were threatened on our left and, under the intense and murderous fire, the Company which had joined us had all its

officers either killed or wounded. The position was impossible to hold. The men still left evacuated the trenches and went about two hundred yards farther back. In spite of his energy, the Major was thinking of falling back, when a Company of the 11th arrived, accompanied by Marine Fusiliers. These brave men marched forward and reoccupied the lost trenches. Many of my comrades had been struck down. I took one of them away who had been dazed by the explosion of a shell in his trench. I then came back, crouching in the ditches to avoid the balls. The shells were falling on every side. We did not trouble any more about them, as it was just luck whether we were hit or not. I wondered whether Job were still living. I did not know and I could not see him anywhere.

It was getting dark. We were now in the park, scattered about as sharpshooters behind a hedge. In front of us were the trenches occupied by our men, reinforced by the Fusiliers. Balls were whizzing about everywhere. Lying down sideways, I hollowed out the earth with my shovel and made a slight parapet. The firing became more and more intense. The Boches were beginning a fresh assault and we could hear them distinctly shouting "Hoch! Lebe der Kaiser!" It was a sight never to be forgotten. In the trenches, and in the park, a strange-looking swarm of men. By the light of the flashes from the firing, we could see dark figures gliding about, running to the right, to the left, or forward. The Belgians and the French were all mingling and making frantic efforts. The Artillery ceased, and then the guns and machine-guns continued alone. What a diabolical concert it was! It seemed as though hell itself had

been let loose. With their fruitless assaults, the Boches made an infernal uproar. They yelled like savages, their clarions rang out, and they were beating their drums. The cannon began again, and the machine-guns told their beads, whilst the rifles discharged murderous volleys. In the midst of the darkness we could hear shouts, calls, orders, exclamations of all kinds. Certain French soldiers, in spite of the danger, when the Boches ran away, seized all kinds of utensils and banged the metal together, making an indescribable din. It was tragically comic, for in the very fiercest of the fight they were joking.

The enemy tried in vain to take our trenches. Those who came near enough to us were mown down. It was a regular massacre. Listening intently, I could hear the imperious commands of the German officers and the obstinate refusal of the soldiers, who were in revolt against the task imposed upon them.

Towards eleven o'clock, during a lull, we were quietly relieved, and, feeling a little more reassured, we went back to Dixmude. We were supplied with provisions and, incredible though it may seem, we spent the night in the attic of a house. No one could sleep. We all had the impression that we should neither leave the town, nor even that house, alive. The shooting continued and we could hear the echo of it. It seemed very near and one would have thought the fighting was taking place in the street. Finally, the cannon began again. The German tactics are to prepare Infantry attacks by a violent bombardment. In the first days of the war, this bombardment lasted three hours and then the attack took place. If this failed, the bombardment began again and gradually increased in intensity.

At the first glimmer of daylight, on the 21st, the Captain called us together under the porch of the house where we had slept. Platoon by platoon, we were to cross the Square, at full speed, where the projectiles were dropping. There was a second of hesitation, then the gate was opened and the first grouped rushed out. At the same instant, a shell burst at our side. The officer and twelve men were wounded.

I left the house, cautiously, with a few comrades, by the garden gate at the back. We slipped along under cover of the shattered houses and reached the bridge, which was in a shaky condition. On this side of the town, trudging along in the mud and rain, there was a pitiful procession of women, children, old men, and indeed the whole population which had remained in the town until now and which was now escaping in terror.

What a sigh of relief we gave when we had once crossed the bridge and were safely on the other side! We went through the ruined village of Caeskerke, the church of which was still burning, and we were then in the country. About two miles away from the town, in the fields, the Battalion was reformed. The various Companies then separated and lay down amongst the verdure, in order to escape being seen by the enemy. About forty of our men were missing. There were about double that number still in our Company. A little warm soup restored us after all the emotions of the last few hours. Job and I were unhurt, we had certainly escaped very narrowly. We were quite joyful, and we told each other various details and exchanged opinions. We almost forgot the furnace we had left, as we joked together. Then

the remembrance of those we had left behind saddened us once more.

Suddenly, some shells passed over us. Their whizzing, and the formidable explosions that followed, warned us that these were not exactly children's playthings. The enemy had no doubt discovered us, for the projectiles dropped very near. We were obliged to move about frequently and to cross the brooks and canals, with which the whole district is interspersed, with the greatest speed. It was by no means easy always and several of us had an unexpected bath. On the road, behind us, the "big blackies" kept bursting, and one of them exploded on an artillery waggon. That was a tragical moment, and we never saw anything more of the waggon, the driver, or the horses.

Finally, after a hundred events of one kind or another, it began to get dark once more. We were quartered for the night in the village of Oostkerke. Nothing happened during the night, but in the distance we could hear the ceaseless firing of guns and cannon.

The following day, October 22nd, we made trenches all day long, covering them with material which we fetched from the half-deserted village. We went there along the railroad, thus avoiding the canals. Towards mid-day, an armoured-train arrived by rail, bringing some English cannons. At last, we said to ourselves, we were to have some heavy Artillery, with which to reply to the Boches. Job and I were just on our way back from the village, carrying a beam on our shoulders, and this prevented our seeing the signal. The cannon was suddenly fired, and we two found ourselves on the ground with the beam in

front of us. We got up, almost stunned, and took ourselves quickly out of the way.

The enemy replied promptly and, in front of us, just before the railway line, the "No. 15 Cigars" kept dropping. Each time that a projectile arrived, with its ominous whizz, we raised our heads, instinctively, just to see where it burst. Fortunately for us, not one of them reached us. We spent the night in our shelters, narrow holes in which we were obliged to remain close together like sardines, half stifled and cramped.

On the 23rd, we continued our work until towards six in the evening. We had almost finished when orders were brought to us. Our Battalion was to return once more in the direction of Dixmude. This was not very re-assuring, but we made our way back, passing again through the ruins of Caeskerke. The white tower of the church was blazing and its gleams lit up the darkness of the night. We had been walking for a long time and were now moving about, backwards and forwards, waiting for definite instructions. They came at last; we were to reinforce the Dixmude troops. We set out in the darkness. A volley of shrapnels exploded over our heads. The men jumped into the ditch which runs along the road and buried themselves as well as they could. A few minutes later, as all was calm, we continued our way. When we were near Dixmude, we took shelter in the houses. We kept a lookout, with our arms ready, as we formed the assaulting column. If the Germans crossed our lines, we should have to use our bayonets. Fortunately they were too well-behaved, or rather too weak.

Towards four in the morning, we went to the relief

of our comrades. To reach the trenches, we had to cross the shaky bridge again. We did this in Indian file and then kept close to the shattered walls. We went down the narrow streets filled with rubbish and, here and there, with the dead. We were constantly obliged to fling ourselves suddenly down, no matter where, and behind no matter what, as the big calibre shrapnels kept coming all the time. At a certain moment they followed us, and several of us were seriously wounded. After a hundred incidents, we managed, by crawling along, to cross the park and reach the trenches. Our companions in misfortune went silently away and we organised the position. Behind us, in the mysterious darkness, we kept seeing long blood-red trails, and these were followed by terrible explosions. Our cannons were carrying death, in their turn, to the enemy lines. I shall never forget those doleful whizzings, that clanging sound of steel, that noise of air filling the vacuum, roaring like a wild sea and then, in the distance, those formidable explosions which intoxicate one and make one thrill with excitement.

It was almost dawn on the 24th, and we were concealing ourselves as best we could, for it was impossible to come out for anything whatever. Everything had to be done secretly, as the German captive balloons were overhead watching everything. The bombardment began once more and the whole earth shook. Over our heads, the shells kept flying. We heard them burst, with a terrible noise, either in the park behind us, or on the town. One of them entered the cellar of a large house and exploded in the midst of our musicians, who were hiding there. Some of them were killed and many of them were

wounded. As for us, we were all crouching down in the trenches. Some of us were watching and the others talking. No one could smile that day, and our only occupation was to keep watch on the horizon, in the direction of the enemy, and to notice where the shells exploded.

Sometimes we were aimed at, and then we could do nothing but collect ourselves together, as it were, with our knapsacks on our backs and wait anxiously until the whizz should pass over us. The number of projectiles which fell beyond our positions is incredible. In front of us, we were faced by death and behind us by devastation. The ground between us and the wood in which the enemy was sheltering was covered with dead animals, cows, horses, pigs, and sheep. At times, I saw one of these animals move. There were even two sheep which were browsing tranquilly, but all the life that remained was doomed to destruction. There was not the slightest lull in the storm all day long. At four in the afternoon, a violent Infantry attack began. This attack was repulsed and the bombardment began again as fresh as ever. All night long, there was a succession of bombardments of the trenches and of all the neighbouring ground, followed by Infantry attacks. The latter were no longer like the attacks we had been having. I had the impression that there was a certain confusion in the direction of them, and that it was more difficult to commence them. After a few minutes, though, there was more zeal and it was a terrible struggle all along the line, finishing with the assault. The attack did not last very long and, almost before the end of it, the bombardment began again. In the execution of these operations, there was admirable

co-ordination, on the enemy's side, between the Infantry and the Artillery action, and this co-ordination was such that when our troops no longer heard the fall of shells in the immediate neighbourhood of the trenches, they were certain of the Infantry attack. As soon as the bombardment ceased, there was firing all along the line and then, as the line approached, the shouts of the assault could always be heard. As the night advanced, the firing was no longer regular but by fits and starts. Hesitation could be felt. As to the defence, full latitude was given to the Commanders of every Company. "As soon as the assault has failed," the Major had said, "get your men in hand again as much as possible, and fire in volleys." Each time I heard these volleys I was glad, for, as I said to myself, the enemy is beating a retreat at some point. The second the volleys ceased, the bombardment recommenced and our Infantry, crouching in the trenches, did not reply. The damage was not very serious, as it is extremely difficult to hit very slight trenches, so that it was only from time to time that an enemy shell really reached them, burying a few men and breaking up the line. When this did happen, we were quickly at work re-establishing our communication, getting the victims from under the ground and sometimes burying them a few yards behind the line. It is impossible to find words of sufficient praise for the heroism of our soldiers in such frightful circumstances. It must be remembered that our poor troops were facing masses of Infantry in overwhelming superiority of number, that they were exposed to a huge quantity of heavy field Artillery, and that they could not reckon on the support of our field batteries, as these were held at

bay by huge German cannons of very much longer range.

Beyond our lines, Dixmude was burning. The continual bombardment had reduced its houses to ashes. The streets were no longer practicable, as the high pile of ruins made it impossible for a foot-passenger to walk through them. This fact greatly complicated the question of ammunition supply. From the rear, we had been informed that the waggons could no longer cross the Yser bridge, nearly a mile away from our positions. Men were sent constantly through the town to fetch sacks of cartridges and, on account of the great quantity of ammunition needed, this going backwards and forwards was continual. This ammunition was brought to a kind of stable near, and then carried to our fighting posts by supply agents.

On the 25th, as soon as it was daylight, the bombardment began again more violently than ever. With my field-glasses, I looked at the plain. Here and there I could see enemy patrols and trenches. At the fringe of the wood, just beyond, I saw troops gliding along and I thought I could see a German on the lookout behind the chimney of a house. At a certain moment, a battery of the enemy Light Artillery took position about 1500 yards away from us. It began firing and its projectiles almost grazed us. We informed our Artillery, which answered feebly. We were furious at this, for we did not know that our gunners were short of ammunition. We had lost our Antwerp stores and the French supply was not yet organised.¹ In

¹ The Artillery ammunition began to be scarce a few days later. Towards the 25th it was chiefly the congested traffic of the railroads which interfered with the supply.

spite of all this, and with our poor resources, we resisted these mass attacks prepared by a diabolical Artillery. On that day, I still had courage enough to write a few words in my note book, whilst Dixmude was crumbling away under the 210 and 280 shells. Everything trembled, the heavens, the earth and—the men. The *Taubes* were hovering over us constantly. They were trying to discover our positions, which they indicated by dropping white fuses. A shower of shrapnels and shells informed us of the result of this information.

Our soldiers presently began to complain. They had nothing to smoke, and some of them began to cut the handles of their knapsacks into shreds. Several of them were ill from this privation and among these was our Lieutenant, the only one left among us. Life now was a martyrdom. After all our overwork and fatigue, we had nothing with which to sustain ourselves, and we felt our strength giving way. We could not get any more provisions and we had no more warm food, as our kitchen had been destroyed at Dixmude by the shells.

The enemy was approaching and we wondered whether we were going to be relieved or reinforced. Alas, no! There was nothing for it but to go on watching, with our bayonets ready, whilst the "big blackies" fell round us all the time. Quite near to us, on the Keyem road and in the park, huge trees were mown clean down and enormous craters, with charred edges, hollowed by these murderous engines of warfare. Sometimes fragments of the shells fell at our feet, or passed over our shelter with a whizz, burying themselves deeply in the ground. Certain projectiles entered the ground without bursting, causing us great anxiety. Our flasks had long been empty and we

were literally dying of thirst. Our Commander asked if a few men would volunteer to fetch some wine from the town. I went with three or four comrades. Dixmude was a lamentable sight. The streets were all torn up and filled with ruins and rubbish of all kinds. The houses were all destroyed and as empty as eggshells. What was underneath all that? Probably, both living and dead, riches and art-treasures. I saw the body of a poor mother, with haggard eyes and clenched teeth. She seemed to me like a reproach to the Germans for their odious war. Near her was a young child, which looked as though it were sleeping. What a number of wrecked houses! Furniture, carpets, and curtains strewed the ground, all this sacked by man returned to a savage state. If the enemy should take the unfortunate city, I thought, he will only have conquered ruins. At the relief station, I found my Lieutenant stretched out on the ground between two Boches. One of these was groaning all the time, the other one was a very young man, scarcely seventeen, I should think. To see my Lieutenant near these two gave me a pang.

We managed to get some wine and then returned to the trench. The distribution of this precious liquid caused our men a little joy and made them more hopeful. Each of them was ready to go to work again with fresh energy. A little later, my friend Job went with a few other men to get some more wine and some cartridges. They were less lucky than we were, for one of them had both legs broken. Another one had the good luck to escape uninjured, although the bottle he was holding was smashed by a bullet.

When the darkness came on again, things looked

very threatening. After sprinkling our trenches with projectiles of every calibre, the German Artillery bombarded the town, in order to prevent any reserves from coming to our relief. The enemy then came out from a wood and moved a little to our right, in the direction of the cemetery, where our 2nd Battalion was lying in wait. The shells fell there in quantities, damaging the tombs and causing a fearful scene. The vaults and tombs opened under the fire and coffins were exposed to view. When our courageous soldiers fell, in the midst of this furnace, we saw what will probably never be seen again, the living buried alive and the dead brought out of their graves. . . .

At daybreak, on the 25th of October, the Germans, in a compact mass, came out of a small wood and moved rapidly, with heads lowered, marching in column, four abreast, towards a canal which separated them from us and which was crossed by only one bridge. By means of a little ditch along the bank, they were able to deploy as sharp-shooters and, in this way, they attempted to cross the bridge. Our men were watching though, and sprinkled the passage with shot, which meant death to the enemy. The bridge was soon obstructed and the dead men were piled up one on the top of the other. The heaps of dead were as high as a man. In spite of this, these loathsome beasts, for they are no longer human beings, crawled up behind their brothers-in-arms, climbed up on to the top of the dead men and . . . fell down from there, under the fire of our machine-guns. The more lucky ones, those who were not hit, fell into the ditch and, getting up again, rushed on to the assault with hoarse cries, only to be killed as they came nearer to us. They were in such quanti-

ties though, and they came on so quickly, that we could not bring them all down and some of them crossed to the right of us. Mad with excitement and eager for carnage, three or four hundred Boches crossed our line and rushed on into Dixmude, uttering wild beast cries and hoping to cause a panic amongst us. The wild band was stopped at the Yser bridge by the fire of our machine-guns. Several fell under the murderous storm and rolled into the canal; the others wheeled round and divided into several detachments. In the town itself, there was now a terrible chase, and a sanguinary hand-to-hand struggle between the Boches and us. We were able to take some of them prisoners though. Hidden in the cellars, as soon as they caught sight of our patrols, they held up their hands in fear and trembling, and begged for mercy. Those who offered the least resistance were shot down. Soon after, our advance sentinels captured some of the enemy who had escaped the massacre. They were crawling along the canal side, hoping to get back to their lines. These were the last of the band. In spite of all their efforts, the Germans had not crossed the Yser, nor broken our resistance. The Belgians and the French Fusiliers were the conquerors. The entrances to our trenches were strewn with enemy equipment and arms, and a few yards in front of us lay dead bodies *pêle-mêle*. Our soldiers searched these bodies and handed over a lot of things to the chiefs. Certain sums of money and jewellery and watches found on the enemy were given back to us, as we frequently had the proof that these objects had been taken from the Belgians.

Once more night came on, putting an end to the terrible work of the day. Our sentinels, in absolute

silence, went back to their outposts, and we waited for the comrades who were to replace us in the trenches. Our food was all gone and nothing more to eat or drink was brought to us. We began to get very anxious. At eleven o'clock, the Senegalese came to take possession of our trenches. These brave soldiers came so quietly that they took us almost by surprise. They are tall, strong fellows, and in the dusk only their eyes and teeth can be seen shining in contrast to their black skin. We were glad to have them with us. They had scarcely been there half an hour, when the enemy attacked them, but without any success. The Senegalese rushed forward to meet the enemy, whom they repulsed with their bayonets and knives. As to us, glad to be free for a time, we marched along with big strides in spite of our fatigue. There was a death-like silence in Dixmude. The stretcher-bearers, taking away the wounded, were all that gave to these smoking ruins a little life. We crossed the shaky bridge over the Yser once more and moved on, after giving a last sad look at the huge pile of *débris*, with its dead, which was all that was left of the town.

On the road, our Major told us that we were going to have a rest, that our banner had just been decorated with the "Order of Leopold," and that the name of "Dixmude" was to be embroidered on it in gold letters.

CHAPTER XXVI

Eight Days in Dixmude

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF AN ARTILLERY OBSERVER, BY
F. DE WILDE OF BRIGADE B (FORMERLY 12TH BRIGADE)

October 19, 1914. We have been at Nieucapelle for the last three days. The war is getting picturesque. Blue or red burnous are now to be seen as the army passes along. The horses are small and their riders perched on the saddle like monkeys. The whole tribe must have set out together, as there are several generations, from youths to old men with faces like parchment.

At eight o'clock, we had been ordered to assemble at Oudecapelle. We found the horde of *goumiers* there, giving a touch of Orientalism to the melancholy Flemish landscape. Our men fraternised with them, and details about Arab life were soon forthcoming.

These Bedouins were accustomed to be paid three francs a day and to have the right of pillaging in the enemy's country. They were constantly asking, after crossing a field, if they were not yet in Germany. Armed with big knives, they kept brandishing them with the gesture of cutting off an enemy's head, at the same time grinning in a way that showed their white teeth. They have a great partiality, too, for ears. Among them was a tall negro, who kept repeat-

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ing in very bad French: "Francise, Belgise, Anglise, all comrades!" Thereupon he would hold out a huge hand and pretend to be drawing his gloves on, rather a suggestive way of asking for some, perhaps.

This country is by no means an easy one for them, cut up, as it is by wide, muddy ditches, in which their horses have to wallow breast high. In the distance, could be heard the English fleet, cannonading the coast and the German columns coming from Ostend. The French Marine Fusiliers, together with the Belgian 5th Division, went to Beerst. A violent combat was engaged there. Beerst was taken, lost, and then retaken by the Fusiliers. German reinforcements, coming from Roulers, compelled all the troops to beat a retreat. It was decided that we should defend the bridge-head at Dixmude. Our Brigade and the French Marine Fusiliers were entrusted with this. We were placed under the command of Admiral Ronarc'h. There was a very frugal board at the Admiral's Headquarters. We managed to find a biscuit and a tin of pressed meat and, what was better still, we found—a mattress.

October 20th. An attack on the bridge-head is imminent. We have received orders to take position at Kapelhoeck with our three batteries, the 40th, 41st, and 42nd. A violent and ceaseless cannonading was to be heard from early morning. Shrapnels, hidden in fleecy clouds, and mine-shells, with a clanging noise and black smoke, kept falling on Dixmude and bursting with a deafening noise.

We were camping in a deserted farm. The dogs had lost their voices and the cattle were wandering about at their own will. At eleven o'clock, the 40th

Battery, under Commander Aerts, was sent to the north of Dixmude, near the Keiserhoek Mill, and the 41st, under Commander Huet, towards Essen.

At noon, just as some atrociously salt pork was simmering on the fire, we were sent with the 42nd battery, under Commander Schouten, to take up our position at Keiserhoek, near the 40th, in order to support the 12th Line Regiment. Major Hellebaut, who commanded the Artillery of Brigade B., Hazard, a pupil of the Military School, a Brigadier Trumpeter, and I were in front. We trotted at a good rate over the paved road and, without uttering a word, crossed the bridge, and went along the streets leading to the Square. A few Infantry Companies, in line by the houses, watched us in bewilderment.

On arriving at West Street, we halted and dismounted in front of the house of the Notary, M. Baert. This house was empty. We left our horses in charge of the Trumpeter and continued our way on foot, through Dixmude, towards Keiserhoek. The town was awful to behold; the streets were absolutely deserted and full of *débris* of all kinds and of shell-holes. The houses were shattered, the walls cracked, the tiles in fragments, and the window-panes broken. In the street leading to Keyem, we noticed enormous splashes of blood. It was no use trying to find which side of the street was more sheltered. We were walking in the very centre of the firing line.¹

Suddenly, on a window ledge, we caught sight of Max, a young Malines collie, which our soldiers had adopted at Boom and which had gone with us on one

¹ According to information taken from an account by Major Hellebaut.

waggon or another everywhere. The poor dog was trembling now with fear. We took him away with us and continued our way. A waggon came back with half of its team. The whole road was being swept with shrapnels and it was impossible to keep straight on. We turned to the right by the Handzaem canal and endeavoured to find Lieutenant-Colonel van Rollegheem, who was in command of the 12th Line Regiment. Thanks to the trees along the canal bank, we reached the trenches. The Colonel was not there. We were advised to try the other side of the canal. A boat was at hand and we crossed, under the sharp whizzing of shrapnels. The Colonel was at the extreme end of the winding line of the Blood Putteken trenches. It was impossible to employ the 42nd Battery there. The 40th, which had been able to put only two of its cannons on the battery in an orchard to our right, had not been able to stay at Keiserhoek.¹ It had two of its horses killed and would have lost a cannon if it had not been for the self-sacrifice of Quartermaster Vivier. The trenches were being shelled. Thanks to wrong observation, the German firing was concentrated on a line of willows, the indistinct outline of which appeared to be a hundred yards away from the retrenchments. Orders were given to us to return to Kapelhoek. We had to go once more into the Dixmude hell. Just as we reached the big Square, a big shell of 21 centimetres fell twenty yards away, at the corner of West Street, filling the whole street with opaque grey smoke. We ran through this to the middle of a heap of stones, bricks, and beams. Another projectile entered by the

¹ This information was obtained from an account given by Artillery Major Hellebaut.

air-hole of a house and killed the band of the 12th Line Regiment which had taken refuge in a cellar. In the meantime, the 41st Battery, returning from Eessen, joined us and the three batteries crossed the bridge over the Yser, arriving at a trot at Kapelhoek. They opened a violent fire on the ground to the south of the cemetery, and the Boches were obliged to clear out. That evening we entered a farmhouse, and found five beds in a state which proved that there had been a hasty flight from there. We jumped into the beds just as we were. There was a deafening noise of Artillery and the sharp crack of guns.

All this was intermittent at first, but it increased until it became incessant. The machine-guns continued all the time. A terrified soldier came in and informed us that there was an attack on the town. All night we heard the tumult of the fight, the roaring of the cannon, the whizzing of balls, and a wild clamour.

October 21st. At daybreak, the firing diminished and the Germans were falling back. Our troops had been superb and had repelled three assaults. A band of prisoners passed by. Nearly all of them were young and had come from Brussels. They had not fought before. According to them, many of their officers had been killed the previous day. They had been replaced by officers they did not know, taken from the central army.

A German officer with dum-dum balls was arrested. When he was questioned, he declared that these balls did not belong to him. As he became arrogant, he was made to turn round. He took advantage of the first moment of inattention for trying to escape. He was shot down at a distance of 150 metres. His

revolver was loaded with these same dum-dum balls, and he was buried at once. We then fired on Vladsloo and on Eessen. We did not have to wait long for the reply and a few of our men were wounded.

The morning was relatively calm, but towards one o'clock, the battle began again as fiercely as the day before. This time the enemy aimed at the roads by which we might retreat. The German firing was more exact now. A quantity of vehicles were stationed on the Oudecapelle road. At the first shells, they started off at a trot for shelter. Three waggons were hit and the horses fell down. The fête began once more and Dixmude was again bombarded violently. A shell set fire to the Collégiale and the tower was soon a brazier. Through the capricious flames we could see an arch for an instant, and then the clock tower foundered in an apotheosis. It began to get dusk and five fires could now be seen against the horizon. Dixmude burst into flames here and there. A roof flamed up and threw a vivid brilliant gleam over the open-work gables. The Germans were firing continually and the bursting of their projectiles made a cloud of sparks. It was dismal and at the same time imposing.

The firing continued and then, in a moment's lull, which seemed strange in the midst of the infernal noise, we heard the charge being sounded. This was followed by an immense and ferocious clamour which was answered by an intense firing. Suddenly, everything was quiet and this sudden silence in the midst of the darkness was most impressive. We wondered whether the enemy had succeeded or been repulsed. The silence continued. Then the firing began again, more intense still and in the same spot.

We breathed freely, for the line had evidently not been forced. The anguish which we had all felt was over. It had been atrocious, that anguish of listening and seeing nothing, knowing nothing for certain, except that our lives and the lives of so many others were at stake, in the midst of the mysterious darkness. We kept all our positions. For three whole days it was one incessant fight. The German Infantry was a few hundred yards away from ours, and on the Yser, to the north of Dixmude, we were each holding one of the banks of the river. For four nights we had taken what rest we could, just as we were, and we had no notion of time. We ate when we could; sometimes the meals were good and frequently bad.

October 22nd. With the dawn the firing slackened. The Germans were falling back and we opened a violent firing in the various directions of their retreat. Then there was silence again. We wondered whether they had changed their points of attack. Towards ten o'clock, an energetic cannonading began towards the right. Our Cavalry Divisions were on that side and the English were making their way vigorously in the same direction. At eleven o'clock, the battle began again. The big calibre abounded on the German side. They showered their 15 and 21 on us in all directions. Nothing was spared. The ground was ploughed up with a frightful noise and the fields studded with enormous craters. Up to the present, there had been more noise than damage. During the afternoon and the evening, the Boches attempted several more attacks, but these all failed. We fired with great rapidity and our storms did a great deal of damage and cut short their attempts. Some of the prisoners told us that we had destroyed one Battalion and

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part of the Cavalry, which had been taking refuge at the Castle to the south of Dixmude. The French army had asked us to hold out two days on the Yser, and our troops had resisted eight days, and had been attacked during six days with terrific stubbornness.

October 23rd, 24th, and 25th. The Infantry attacks were getting fewer and farther between. On the other hand, the Artillery was working hard. The Germans have a fearful proportion of Artillery of all calibres, and it is their cannon that does the most work.

The struggle continued like the day before and the day before that. It was the Battle of the Aisne continuing. The adversaries had retrenched themselves, and more particularly before Woumen. The Boches had piled up their embankments here. As I was out on observation every day, along the banks of the Yser, I could see their trenches spring out of the earth as though by magic, grow longer and become intersected with each other. They work with an ease and activity that is remarkable. In a place where there was nothing at night, a close network of trenches is to be seen the following day, together with a series of junctions and communication trenches. We fired violently, and overturned their mole-heaps, but a few minutes later we could see the rapid movement of earth turned over, and hear the noise of the iron spades, which would soon restore the damaged places.

In the distance, a few patrols were moving about; a battery was passing by at a trot in a sheltered road. In the beet-root fields, to the south of Dixmude, could be seen long, grey figures lying in front of the German retrenchments. This was a neutral zone, within which no one could enter. All this was the ransom of

the battles of the previous day, these were the dead bodies that could not be brought in.

On the evening of the 23rd, we heard groans and shouts in bad French coming from the long grasses in the fields. This was the first time I had heard wounded men shouting. A few voices could be heard above the rest: "Help! Help! French . . . wounded!"

We wondered what this fresh ruse was, for ruse it certainly was, and a very palpable one. We did not stir, of course, and all was soon quiet again. The Artillery was not long quiet though, and the quantity of ammunition it consumed was considerable. The Germans bombard with unprecedented energy. The small calibre had almost disappeared and only the heavy guns were now doing their part. Mine-shells exploded with a noise like thunder. It was sheer madness, for the Boches were evidently firing without much observation, as, after placing the batteries, instead of firing in a way to destroy everything, they changed their target, fired at longer or shorter range, peppering the whole district, but not doing any great damage. When they have an idea though, they persist in it, so that when their idea was to attack one special point, they went on shooting with admirable persistency—even when there was nothing at the point at which they were aiming. A shell has just burst under one of our windows, breaking the panes and staining the Adjutant Major's papers with mud. Our roof is like a sieve at present. One or other of us is all the time at the telephone. The wires are broken constantly by the shells. The telephonists run along and the communication is set up again. Night and day, we hear the strident ring of the tele-

phone bell. Some information arrives, or an order is given, one of the officers gets up, rushes off to the battery—and a telephonic message orders us to stop firing for the moment. When there is an important piece of information, everyone starts off. The dry, hoarse voice of our 75 mingles hurriedly with the dull rumblings in the distance, and with the formidable explosions of the projectiles that arrive. After this, all who have luck go to rest again, the privileged ones in any beds that are free, and the others on straw that is spread each night in the kitchen. For a whole week we have been installed on this farm. We have managed to find a few vegetables for our table, but meat is rare. The first day, we feasted on fowl, but now there are no more fowl. Then we had a pig killed. To-day, we have some tinned meat; to-morrow, I do not know what we shall have. Our greatest privation is the scarcity of cigarettes. We are reduced to making shapeless cigarettes with bad pipe tobacco. There is literally nothing to be had here. The water is so salty that we drink only coffee. Fortunately there is no shortage of milk. Our men go, in the early morning, and milk the wandering cattle which they find enjoying themselves in the beet-root fields. Not a single dog barks. They all go creeping along close to the buildings, with their tails between their legs, and at the first whizz of a shell they jump down wildly into any hole they happen to find. The projectiles have made a hecatomb of cattle on every side. All the famous meadows round Dixmude and Veurne-Ambacht are strewn with dead cows, lying on their back with their feet in the air. The game is all terrified. The cannonading keeps on all the time: the shooting is intermittent

during the day and almost incessant during the night. Whenever there is a lull, the prolonged roar of the Ypres cannon in the distance is deafening. All this noise gets on our nerves, which are already at full tension.

October 26th. Dixmude, Kapelhoek. At six in the morning, we were suddenly roused by a firing almost in our ears. The bullets lodged in our walls. It was evidently an alert. A Commander came back to us calling out: "The Germans are 400 yards away!" We got up in haste, amazed at what we heard. On looking out, we were greeted by a hailstorm of bullets. They seemed to come from all sides at once, so that it seemed as though we were surrounded. We took counsel together quickly.

"To the guns," was the order "and shrapnel fire at short distance!"

It was impossible to get to the batteries. The morning mist was hanging over everything. We could see only indistinct figures moving about. There was a moment's lull in the firing and our men rushed to the guns. The zeal of one of our gunners was fortunately calmed in time. He was just about to aim at one of our own patrols.

"What is the meaning of this? Where are they? What is the matter?" were the questions everyone was asking.

About fifty Germans had crossed the Yser and search was being made for them. I rushed off to Headquarters to give this information and to bring help. I met a patrol of Dragoons, another of Fusiliers, and a third of Carabineers. The alarm had been given.

At the Admiral's Headquarters, everyone was up

and discussing the incident. An enemy detachment had crossed the river and caused a panic, thanks to its firing, but at daybreak the troops had pulled themselves together, the positions were reoccupied, and the hunt was taking place. I went out towards Dixmude and, in a ditch, I saw two Germans lying face downwards in the mud. On the other side the road were two bluejackets, with their sweaters unbuttoned and the blood flowing freely. A girl, half wild with anxiety, rushed across to me. She had been helping an old woman along. "Oh, sir, my mother is dying; something to put her on, so that she can be carried!" I could only point to the Headquarters. Just then a stretcher passed by, carried by four of the Fusiliers. On it was the dead body of Commander Jeannot. His face was covered with a handkerchief, but his crushed arm was hanging down and he had a fearful wound in his thigh. There were dead bodies heaped up on the Dixmude bridge. One of them was still hanging on to the railings, which he had clutched in his death-agony. All of them had quantities of wounds, holes in their breasts, and eyes wide open, scared by the frightful sights they had seen. Beyond the bridge were heaps of dead bodies, lying *pêle-mêle* with their stiff limbs intermingled and their coagulated blood on the pavement.

Still farther on were more dead bodies. A few Belgians were also sleeping their last sleep on the foot-path. Patrols were going to and fro, searching houses, their weapons in their hands and their eyes on the lookout for everything. As I went farther into Dixmude, I found heaps of ruins, charred walls, blackened stumps, broken windows. In one house, the whole façade had given way and the ceilings had

remained. It looked like a piece of stage scenery. Strangely enough, too, one house stood entirely unscathed. The Square was completely torn up and there were rows of craters bordered by paving stones.

The Council House could still boast the skeleton of its clock tower and the stained glass was still dropping from its window frames. The headless tower and the four walls were all that remained standing of the Collégiale building.

On my return, I met two stretchers, on one of which was an old German officer who had been mortally wounded, and on the other an immense fellow with square shoulders, wearing enormous spectacles with horn rims. The men could scarcely carry him, as he was so heavy. On returning to the battery, I learnt that two prisoners had been taken. I went to see the place where the last struggle had taken place. About fifteen bodies were lying on the muddy ground, which was all bespattered with blood. Four of the men were still living. The Major in command was lying on his back, dead, with his mouth open and his skull pierced. A Lieutenant had fallen sideways with his arm under him. He was young, with refined features. He was very carefully dressed and was wearing extremely fine linen. One of the blue-jackets approached, turned him over skilfully, and plunged his hands in the dead man's pockets.

"Ah, not much there, his pockets have been cleared out!" This was the only funeral orison he had.¹

The other bodies were covered with wounds, for the bayonet is a terrible weapon. A little farther on

¹ The Major's name was von Oidtmann. He was in command of a Battalion of the 222nd Augusta Regiment. The Lieutenant's linen was marked P. and P. C.

were the Fusiliers who had been assassinated in so cowardly a way. Their wounds were frightful.

After this alert, the morning was almost tranquil. It was not until the afternoon, that the Artillery began once more its nerve-wearing fire.

October 27th. Dixmude-Kapelhoek. After their failure of yesterday, it seemed as though the Germans wanted to change the point of attack. They went towards the north. Thirteen foot-bridges had been thrown over the Yser towards Tervaete and some of their troops had landed on our side of the river.

A French Division reinforced us, thus enabling us to make a vigorous counter-offensive, but without regaining all the lost land. The Artillery struggle began again more fiercely than ever. The heavy guns were used almost entirely. Their projectiles seemed to cut the air. The explosions were terrible, sending up into the air enormous masses of earth. The splitting of the shells was such that at 800 metres fragments arrived like a whirlwind with a threatening bee-like noise. We picked up a fragment 45 centimetres long, by 12 broad and 6 in thickness. *Taubes* were flying overhead. Around Dixmude, the network of trenches was getting more and more complicated. It was getting gradually smaller, and the encircling movement had commenced.

We remained at Dixmude until the 6th of November. On that day, French batteries came to relieve us, and on that day we had only one cannon left out of twelve; the eleven others had been disabled. We had seen the grip getting tighter and tighter, the cannonading more violent, the firing more intense, and the assaults more frequently repeated. When necessity obliged us to leave, we had, at any rate, seen the

inanity of the adversaries' furious attacks and their recoil from the quiet, mounting water and the inundation, which had just begun at the right moment. We had been able to guard intact the last shred of our beloved Belgium.

CHAPTER XXVII

Four Hours with the Boches

FROM THE DIARY OF DR. VAN DER GHINST, OF THE CABOUR
(ADINKERQUE) MILITARY AMBULANCE, AND AN ACCOUNT
GIVEN BY LÉON DELIENS, PRIVATE OF THE 11TH LINE
REGIMENT

October 24th. Dixmude, at night. By the sinister light of the burning houses, the Belgian soldiers and the French Marine Fusiliers were moving about among the ruins, in the midst of the flames which skimmed along the ground. With blackened faces, haggard eyes, and unkempt beards, their uniforms covered with blood and with dust, they went up and down the streets, springing over the stones, beams, and *débris* of all kinds, and climbing over walls. The gigantic shadows which they threw added to the phantasmagoria of the strange scene. From time to time a shrapnel burst, vibrating in the air with the sound of a huge tuning-fork, or with a great flood of light the explosion of a shell made the cracked walls shake.

Our relief post was installed in what had formerly been a much frequented drawing-room in the house of a notary. Presently, the stretcher-bearers brought in a wounded man who, between his groans, told us that the Germans had entered the town. This seemed incredible, as our trenches formed an un-

interrupted barrier. We thought the man must be delirious. Very soon, a second wounded man told us the same thing and it was confirmed by a third. One of them told us that he had seen the dead body of a German at the Square, nearly two hundred metres away from our ambulance. We began to wonder whether our line had been broken? If so, it would mean street fighting. Two days ago, the French doctors had transported their installations beyond the Yser. The only thing for us to do was to imitate them and so save our wounded. Without wasting a minute, I had them put into an ambulance carriage. We crossed the bridge and took the road leading to Caeskerke. On arriving at a little wine-shop, about four hundred yards outside this place, where another Belgian relief post had been installed, we carried our patients in and made them as comfortable as we could.

In the night, I was roused suddenly by my faithful orderly.

"The Germans are here!" he shouted, shaking me out of my slumber. In a second, I was on my feet. All my companions, doctors and stretcher-bearers, I found in the principal room of the wine-shop, talking together in the dark. I asked what had happened and they explained to me, in a whisper, that a trumpet blast, which was not ours, had been heard. After that there had been firing and shouts, and then a rush of men passing like a hurricane by our door, in the direction of Caeskerke. They were all shouting: "Hurrah!"

If this were so, our lines must have been forced and, whatever happened, it was necessary for us to know the truth. Anything was better than this mortal

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anguish. I opened the door. It was pitch-dark outside, an October night, cold and rainy. I could hear groans coming from the house opposite. With my Browning in my hand I entered and, by the light of my electric lamp, I saw two men stretched out on the floor, side by side, giving no sign of life. On approaching, I recognised Lieutenant Richard, of the Navy, and Abbé Le Helloco. I heard a groan coming from a corner of the room and found Dr. Duguet, the Head Doctor of the Marine Fusiliers.

Two stretcher-bearers, in answer to my call, came and fetched my unfortunate colleague to our relief station.

"My back is broken," he said, with a moan.

I tried to reassure him, and he then told me that, on hearing the shouts, the three officers, less prudent than we had been, rushed to the door of their house. Their outline, standing out in the framework of the door, made an excellent target and they had all three fallen, hit by the horde as it rushed forwards. We wondered what would happen next and what had become of our Staff, which had its Headquarters in one of the neighbouring houses. What had happened to our brave Colonel Jacques, to Captain Philippron, and to their comrades? I rushed to the house where they were installed, and rapped. The door was promptly opened, but several revolvers were all I saw, and they were pointed at my head.

"Doctor van der Ghinst!" I shouted.

At the sound of my voice, the Brownings were lowered. In spite of the darkness, I recognised Colonel Jacques.

"What is the meaning of this joke, Colonel?" I asked.

"Yes, yes," answered the voice of our Chief, "the African." "The Boches have got through. You cannot stay here; we must have a reinforcement."

"Where is it to be found?"

"There is a Battalion at Caeskerke. The question is who will go and take the information?"

"I will," I answered. "The road appears to be clear."

I was soon on my way. A French sailor, going in the same direction, went with me. It was perfectly dark. Stretching our heads forward, we tried to peer into the darkness. We had scarcely gone two hundred yards when we heard voices.

"Halt!" cried someone. Thinking I had to deal only with French soldiers, I replied: "Belgian doctor." "Hands up!" was the command. I could now see, in the ditch, to the left, some pointed helmets and also some bayonets confronting us. There was nothing to be done, as all resistance would have been in vain. If we had moved a step, we would have been killed. We had to go down into the ditch, where we found other victims. I protested in German, declaring that I was a doctor. Thanks to this, I had to attend a great lanky Teuton officer, who had been wounded in the leg. I gradually distinguished a certain number of prisoners, among whom I recognised Léon Deliens and Gaston de Marteau, Privates of the 11th Line Regiment. Their hands were tied behind their backs, their braces cut, and their trousers unbuttoned, so that it was impossible for them to escape. The same fate awaited me and also my companion in distress. I protested energetically in German, and this produced a magical effect. An officer questioned me and asked me about the position

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of the troops at Dixmude. "I am a doctor," I replied, "and I know nothing about military questions. Even if I could reply, though, I should not, as such questions are contrary to the stipulations of The Hague Treaty." The officer did not insist.

In the dark night, an absolute silence reigned, only broken now and then by the brief orders of the Chief, a Major with a hoarse voice, whose name was von Oidtmann. Presently a carriage appeared on the road. It was a French Red Cross ambulance car that the Boches had captured. The Major sent it to Dixmude with the order to get to the German lines and bring back instructions to him. When the carriage reached the bridge, the French sentinel cried out: "Halt! Who goes there?" "Red Cross," answered the German driver. You can imagine that, in an instant, the carriage was surrounded and that, one after another, the Boches were taken out.

In the meantime, the Major and his three Lieutenants were deliberating in the ditch. By listening to their discussions, I gathered that seventy Germans had managed to get through our lines at the junction between a French and a Belgian trench, that they had passed through Dixmude, crossed the bridge, and rushed along the Caeskerke road like a bomb, passing by the relief posts, the various Staffs, and reserves. They were now hiding in this ditch, three hundred yards away from the railway station, and were awaiting the remainder of their Battalion, which did not arrive. One or two of the Marine Fusiliers were captured as they were passing along the road, and a cyclist who refused to stop was killed. The time seemed very long and the Major was evidently getting impatient, for, whilst I was talking to one of my warders, I

overheard him give the following orders: "Shoot the prisoners!" I protested and, to my great astonishment, my warder protested too. "No," he said, "we cannot behave inhumanely, not the doctor!" Knowing the severity of the German discipline, I was agreeably surprised at this instance of individuality. The young German who protested was charming. He was a Berlin law-student, and several of his university friends protested with him, so that the order was not carried out.

Presently, the Germans got up, and endeavoured to advance, but the head of their column came to a trench occupied by the Marine Fusiliers. A few shots were exchanged and the troop, after crossing a field, went in the direction of the railway line. There we made another halt and, for the second time, the order was given: "Shoot the prisoners!" The order was not executed this time, probably thanks to the intervention of a German soldier, who was a doctor. He had introduced himself to me whilst we were marching and he told me that he should speak to the army doctor.

The Germans now saw that their 'comrades had not been able to follow them and that their only chance of safety was to go back, by the railway bridge, across the Yser, and get to their own lines again. We went over the railway line from Caeskerke to Dixmude and were only twenty yards away from the armoured train which they did not see. We walked along in silence, two by two, with our warders on guard. Presently we came to a group of about fifteen Germans who were behind a mill and we all lay down on the ground. Four shrapnels burst over our heads. A young sailor had his leg shot through. Deliens

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dressed the wound quickly. A German said in a mocking tone: "Good German shrapnels!" This was true. We set off again and for more than two hours we walked across fields, jumping hedges, ditches, and streams. When we were trying to avoid a stream about three yards wide, a German asked: "Is that the Yser?" We could not help laughing. We were now quite lost and were plodding along in the mud, frozen to the bones. The officers went groping along. With the help of an electric lamp hidden in their long coats, they consulted their maps and the compass. Between the Major and his subordinates there were violent discussions as to the way we should go. I noticed the confidence the Germans have in their chief. Every minute we could hear someone asking: "Where is the Major?" and he, with brief orders, shouted in a hoarse voice, reminding them to pay attention to the prisoners, maintained cohesion among his grey flock. My poor companions in misfortune, some of whom, at my request, were freed, now helped each other, dragging along in groups with great difficulty. The young soldier who had been wounded, leaning on Deliens and de Marteau, trotted along courageously, leaving a track of blood behind him.

Several young law and theology students walked with me and we conversed in German. They were Volunteers of the 202nd Regiment, who had just arrived fresh from Berlin and who were under fire for the first time.

"How long do you think the war will last?" they asked.

"Six months, or perhaps more," I replied.

"Oh no," they exclaimed, "that is impossible.

"Italy has declared war on France and we have just taken 250,000 Russian prisoners."

"And do you believe such tales?" I asked.

"We must believe what we are told."

When I asked them why they had attacked Belgium, I could get no other reply than the one word: "Necessity."

They were surprised, in their turn, that so many young men in Belgium were not under arms and they were proud of their own patriotism, which, beside the compulsory service, had given them 2,000,000 Volunteers. "We have 15,000,000 soldiers," they said.

"We are through with it, are we not, Doctor?" asked an officer in a jeering tone. I simply shrugged my shoulders in an evasive way. We were marching all the time and when we turned a corner, in the darkness, we always ran the risk of coming upon a field-gun which would mow down friends or enemies alike. From time to time we were grouped.

A soldier pushed me roughly and I protested.

"I am an officer, if you please," I said, and oh, discipline, he apologised!

Another soldier wanted me to carry his bag. I refused on the same ground, and he did not insist.

Gradually, the night became less dark and the dawn appeared. It was the pale dawn of a rainy day. About seven hundred yards away from us, in the indistinct light, we saw a woman and a child hurrying along, laden with packages. A few shots were fired.

"Gute Leute," said some men and the firing ceased. A similar scene took place farther on, when a man and a woman appeared at the door of a farm-house. It was now light, as it was 5.30. The smoking ruins of Dixmude could be seen through the mist and this

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served as a landmark. We marched on in that direction, wondering whether this might prove our salvation or our misfortune. A discussion began between the Major and one of his Lieutenants. In the midst of it, there was a volley fired from a Belgian trench which brought down five Germans. A brief command was given:

"Right about face and quick march!" With bayonets behind us, we had to beat a retreat. Some shots were fired from a farm and bullets whizzed through the air. We were certainly within the line of the Allies. The Major gave orders that the prisoners should march in front of the Germans. Fifteen of us formed the first rank. My companion on the right, Frigate Captain Jeanniot, explained to me that, on seeing the Boches, he had come towards them to parley, with a Belgian, as interpreter, and he had invited them to surrender. He had been made a prisoner.

"They are turning round, they are lost," remarked a soldier.

Our position was most dangerous, as firing was directed against us from every farm.

A German fell and I moved towards him, but a brief order: "Vorwaerts!" and the threat of a pistol stopped me. The unfortunate man, holding out his hand and imploring help, was left to his fate, without a word of encouragement or of consolation. Decidedly that Major was a brute. We were just passing by Major Hellebaut's Belgian Battery and we should certainly have been greeted with firing, if it had not been for Lieutenant de Wilde, who discovered, just in time, that there were Allies' uniforms in the enemy group. The situation was most critical, as our

warders were more and more occupied with replying to the firing of our men. This was our moment of neck or nothing. My stretcher-bearer and the French sailor whom I had led into the fray followed my lead. I moved along gradually, more and more slowly, until I reached the rear and then sank down in a trench that was not very deep. Nothing happened, as no one had noticed our disappearance. We got away by crawling along and then with a few bounds we were soon out of reach. We were saved!

This account is completed by the soldier Léon Deliens.

"Just at this moment," said the latter, "a German officer shouted: 'What must we do with the prisoners?'"

"Shoot them dead!" replied another. A shot was fired at Commander Jeannot, who was not hit. It was a terrible moment. Our warders hurried us along and pushed us about. They had lost their heads and, after taking a roundabout way, they were going towards Dixmude. Suddenly an energetic firing began and the German ranks suffered severely. The Major assembled his men and someone, I cannot say whether he or a Lieutenant, gave the order: "Shoot the prisoners dead!" Each soldier chose a prisoner. Their bayonets pierced the defenceless breasts of their victims and shots were fired point-blank.

My executioner aimed at me, his gun on his hip. I flung myself down on the ground and the bullet passed over my head. I got up again and, with a bound, rushed off some forty yards. My shoes sank in the mud and I fell down again with my head in the mud. The next bullet must have missed me, as I did

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not feel any wound. There was a veritable hailstorm of bullets and, when I looked up, the Boches were beating a retreat. The Major was giving his commands, but in a hoarse voice. I saw the French rushing out to assault and I was between two fires. The soil flew into the air, wounded men were howling with pain, and I could hear the death rattle of our poor comrades who had been assassinated. There was a medley of blue, black, and grey uniforms. A fit of furious anger took possession of me. I sprang up, seized a German gun and fired the three cartridges that the weapon contained. I waved my forage cap towards the French who were hurrying along. One of them fell; I seized his gun with its bayonet and, in mad, indescribable rage, animated by an irresistible thirst for revenge, I rushed forward and confronted Major von Oidtman. He was still shouting, holding his riding-whip in one hand and his Browning in the other. I must own that he was braver than ever at that moment. I plunged my bayonet into his left side, under his heart, and he fell down all in a lump.

The scene then changed and the Boches surrendered, holding up their hands, imploring mercy and offering money. My comrade, de Marteau (spared by good luck, as a bullet had pierced his forage cap), and I took some prisoners with us and returned, very much astonished at coming out of this skirmish safe and sound.

By Admiral Ronarc'h's order, the Germans were recognised as having fired on the prisoners were shot. Of the seventy Boches who had crossed the Dixmude bridge twenty-five were living. Of the fifteen prisoners they had taken, all the French were either killed or wounded. The poor young sailor who had

been wounded in the leg was killed outright by the Germans, and a soldier of the Belgian Engineers was massacred.

I never think of those frightful hours that we passed without a feeling of deep admiration for the stoic patience, the contemptuous silence, and the indifference to death of Commander Jeannot and of all my unfortunate companions.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Tervaete Charge

BY ARTILLERY CAPTAIN M—— C——

(In memory of Major Count Henri d'Oultremont.)

REFUSING stubbornly to budge from the Yser, the Belgian army was struggling desperately with the enemy, making a frantic effort to hold on to the last shred of its beloved country. The valiant little army had been asked to hold out for forty-eight hours in the gigantic and unequal combat in which it was engaged. It had done this, but relief had not come, and the fierce battle had now lasted five days. The defenders of their country had now decided to die at this spot rather than yield.

The stubborn fight had so undermined the strength of the heroic army that it was now like a wrestler, out of breath and at the last gasp, only sustained by the extreme tension of his nerves and the force of a fixed idea. The army was short of ammunition and of reserves. It consisted now of a meagre line of almost exhausted men, tired in every limb, but making a last desperate effort. It seemed probable that, under a formidable push of the Germans, some point would give way and cause disaster along the whole of the rest of the line.

The Germans continued unceasingly to harass our wearied troops with their machine-guns and with fresh assaults until, finally, at Tervaele they managed to break through our line. When once the breach was made, the stream rushed in like a wild torrent, gaining the left bank of the river and driving back our Battalions in disorder. With a frightful whirl, everything gave way before the massed effort of the enemy. A furious, mute, desperate counter-attack was crushed and wasted in this gulf of death. It was simply stifled and mown down by the deadly work of two hundred machine-guns.

There was then a moment of terrible anguish experienced along the whole line. Our troops had fallen back, without yielding, and were thronging together, forming two wings on the Yser, at the extremities of the huge bend where the Germans had broken through the defence.

This fresh front was like a fragile rampart of earth piled up in haste before a powerful torrent, a rampart which would surely fall away under the rush of the waters, as fast as it was built up. There was no longer any organised unity of action. Each one was fighting on his own account. It was an amalgamation of horrible looking men, all covered with mud and with blood, their faces blackened by the smoke of explosions. They no longer looked like human beings. As they fought there, with haggard eyes and weary arms, it was more like a vision of hell, lighted up for a moment by the wan flashes from the guns. We wondered what would happen? Was this to be the end of everything? In front of us, the attack was still coming along in constant and ever-increasing waves, with an ominous roaring, beating down our

crumbling human wall with furious shocks. Could our army possibly resist these endless assaults?

Just at this moment, the order arrived for this spectre of a troop to take the offensive and, by means of a general counter-attack, to fling the enemy back, at any cost, on the other side of the river. The instructions given were in the following simple words: "Your charge must be a wild rush."

The order passed through the dislocated ranks like an electrical current. A thrill of glory was felt by every man in the line. The blackened faces looked up once more and turned pale under the masks of blood and dirt, and all eyes flashed once more with a superhuman light. A splendid thing was then seen, a thing that seems incredible in its grandeur. All these wavering fragments of an army suddenly formed up again in a solid block. In the fresh ranks, each man took his place just where he happened to be. Wounded men got up from the ground and wedged their way into the mass to increase the weight. From the nearest Sectors, troops rushed forward and mixed with the others. And then the whole newly formed line moved forwards, with great difficulty at first, making a formidable effort under the hurricane of fire. Then a wild rush took place and, with a bound, they were there in the Prussian lines; foot-soldiers, cavalrymen, pioneers, gunners, soldiers, and officers, valid or crippled, all had flung themselves *pêle-mêle* on their enormous adversary, going straight ahead in the breaches that opened before them and their bayonets. Here and there, in the chaos of mingled troops, a clearer line marked the points where the neighbouring troops had rushed in to reinforce

them. In some places, thanks to the impulsion of fresh energy, salient points could be seen pushing forward and leading on the rest. And, in the midst of the fray, above the roaring din of the battle, one cry could be heard, one conquering cry, uttered as though by one voice coming from three thousand men, a cry that grew louder and louder, swelling as it were under the influence of its own frenzy, a cry that could be heard over all the plain, like the rumbling of a wild storm: "Long live the King! Long live Belgium!"

The first enemy line was driven back under the sudden rush. Behind it, the second line gave way, and then each wave driven back drove back the following one, and there was general disorder among the German troops. It was a carnage for which there are no words. There was no longer any question of numbers or of tactics. Only one thing was evident now, a mysterious and all-powerful thing, the force of a will stronger than death itself, dominating all material things.

The Germans, disconcerted by the suddenness of all this, were seized with panic. With an irresistible effort, our panting, breathless soldiers, veritable phantoms of death, crushed all resistance. In their rush forward, without a second's hesitation and in their continued rush, they had driven back the enemy masses as far as the Yser; they pushed them to the brink and then into the river itself. Half dead themselves with their superhuman effort, they reoccupied the dyke and—the last shred of Belgian territory was saved.

CHAPTER XXIX

A Reconnaissance

FROM THE DIARY OF FATHER HÉNUSSE, S. J., CHAPLAIN OF THE
84TH BATTERY

November 28, 1914. This morning, our dear Captain had just begun reading the daily orders, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"Ah, no, it begins to get on one's nerves! This footbridge is a regular see-saw. We cannot go on being fooled like this!" He threw the paper down on the table and went out of the room. Something was evidently on his nerves.

I picked up the paper and read that, contrary to the aviation information received the last few days, there was a footbridge across the Yser, between the milestones 15 and 16, on a level with the petroleum tanks and opposite the "Nacelle." This was the tenth time we had been informed that this bridge existed, and just as many times we had been told that it did not exist. We were first ordered to destroy it with shells and then to stop firing there, as the objective was an imaginary one. This little game had unhinged our Captain, and this morning he was more unhinged than I had ever seen him. When he came back, I saw by his face that it was one of the days of his big decisions. He was extremely reserved, and appeared

to have his ideas concentrated on some subject. He did not utter a word and I said to myself, "Either our Captain is going to fulminate a 'note' or he is going to investigate that footbridge himself." I had guessed rightly. He put on his boots and gaiters, placed his Browning behind his hip and his field-glasses in his breast-pocket, took up his cap, and made his exit, without even uttering his famous: "*Au revoir*, my friends."

It was ten in the morning, and a regular November morning, grey, cold, and damp, but as a matter of fact no one took much notice of the weather. All day long we were inside the infamous little farm that we had nicknamed "Taboo Farm" because, in the midst of a plain ravaged by shells, it was the only building that had remained intact. Two or three "saucepans" had fallen in the farmyard, shattering all the windows, but that was all. We replaced the window-panes by planks of wood and mattresses and lived in a little cavern-like room, sitting round a cracked stove, in which we only burned wood. As to showing our faces outside, that was not good enough. In the first place there was the mud, the terrible "polder mud," slimy, deep, and clinging. After walking ten steps, one came back with enormous cakes of about twenty pounds on each foot. And then there were the petroleum tanks, the two enormous tanks over yonder in the background of the Yser. They dominated the whole region in its autumn bareness and were like two sentinels of Death. For the last month they had been riddled by the firing, and the petroleum had flamed up. Oh, the fine flames, lighting up with a glorious fire the Dixmude victory! These tanks were now full of holes like sieves. One

of them had given way and fallen in, but the other one was still standing and made an admirable observation-post for the enemy's artillery, so that we did not care to attract their terrible "saucepans" in the direction of "Taboo Farm."

At noon, our Chief had not returned. We waited luncheon until one o'clock and then we decided not to wait any longer. The inevitable soup, made of preserved peas, and the pneumatic-tyre beefsteak disgusted me a little more than usual. I was feeling very anxious about the Captain. I made enquiries two or three times at the battery, but the same reply came each time: "We have not seen him since this morning, when he came to give the command of the battery over to the Lieutenant."

Towards three in the afternoon, the door was opened noisily and in he walked. He looked tired out, but his eyes were feverishly bright. He was all be-starred with mud and, half joyfully, half wearily, in a way not at all like himself, he sank on to a chair.

"Well, I always said so," he remarked. "There is no footbridge, but, my boys, it came very near there being no Captain either." . . . "What happened? Tell us!" we all begged, crowding round him. "Give me a beefsteak first. I am dying of hunger. And some coffee, too, for I am parched with thirst."

He then took his boots off, pitching one to the right and the other to the left, and his gaiters anywhere.

"There!" he said, at last. "I have been myself, for I had had enough of that nonsense. Lieutenant Zaedydt, Brigadier Marteau, and I set off together. We could not stand that sort of thing any longer and I was determined to get to the bottom of it, if we had to go right there ourselves. Things went all right as far

as the Yser, to the milestone 16. The last of the trenches occupied by the French Territorials are there, but we could not discover anything that was of any use to us. Looking out from there, towards the north, on a level with the tanks, there was something that looked like a footbridge over the Yser, but it was not distinct enough for us to be sure about it and we decided to go on along the river.

Just then, the French howitzers opened fire on the tanks: all the firing was from eighty to one hundred yards too far. Suddenly our good little eighty-four began to spit. You cannot imagine the pleasure it gave us to hear it quite near to its target. It was hitting a ruined house and each shot entered straight inside. It was the famous wine-shop, where we had been told there was a battery. All rubbish! There was no more a battery there than there is on my hand. All the same the firing was good.

"We left the Territorials and went on, half crawling. We made good progress along the river just below the towpath. A hundred yards farther on were two French sentinels, who wished us good luck, and then two Belgian sentinels belonging to the 2nd Chasseurs. We could see nothing but their heads emerging from a hole, and after this we met no one. To the left, was a great sheet of inundation, to the right, was the Yser, and beyond, apparently nothing but deserted ruins. We kept on our way and, presently, came up against a huge tree lying on the ground and barring the towpath. We had to go round this obstacle and we first passed behind the ruins of a little house, built on the roadside. We were now advancing towards the inundation. It was all terrible. Ruins of houses broke the surface of the lake here and there. Some-

times we saw the dead bodies of horses and of cows there, too. There was also a dead man, a poor young Belgian Chasseur. He must have been there since the Dixmude battle. He was fair-haired, half buried in the mud, his gun under his arm and his head thrown back, so that his pointed beard was skyward and he was wearing an eyeglass. We were now once more on the towpath and were a little nearer the famous footbridge. It was only a hundred yards from us. We stood still and at once understood. On looking at the map, you will see on the left bank of the Yser the two petroleum tanks near the towpath, where we then were. On the right bank is the "Nacelle," as indicated on the map, but at this spot, 150 yards above the tanks, the Yser makes a bend and, consequently, what is at the water's edge on the left bank looks, from where we are, as though it were on the right bank. Now on the left, starting from the tanks and projecting over the river, are two big pipes, by means of which the boats get the petroleum on board, and these two pipes, seen projecting on the right bank, are what had been taken for a footbridge, and it is on this imaginary footbridge that we have been firing like imbeciles.

"Farther on, there is a footbridge facing the road which crosses the last 'e' of Oudstuyvekenskerke on the map. Just as we had taken note of this, we heard 'Bzim! Bzim! Bzim!' and a whole collection of balls broke up the ground around us. We threw ourselves flat down first, and then began to concert. Where had they come from was the first question. It was not possible to decide that, but, instinctively, we suspected the petroleum tanks and the terrible house with turrets, to the left of the petroleum tanks,

and the cemented cellar, between the house and the tanks, where we could see the black mouths of the loopholes. We decided to rush along the towpath and bury ourselves in the deserted trenches along the bank sloping down to the river. We went along like three zebras. 'Bzim! Bzim! Bzim!' We were in our holes though—for our refuge was not a regular trench, but separate holes made for single riflemen and divided by earth.

"Zaedydyt was in one hole, Marteau in another, and I in a third, separated from each other by the distance of a yard to a yard and a half. We were quiet for a few minutes, getting our breath again, and then we began a fresh consultation, without being able to see each other. As there were about twenty of these holes, we decided that we would each spring out, turn round on our stomachs, so that our legs should drop into the next hole, and then slip down bodily into it. This we did, and the Boches must have had an amusing sight if they were watching us. Three men springing out of a hole, pirouetting on their stomachs, and disappearing into the next hole. Each time we were greeted by the same volley, 'Bzim! Bzim! Bzim!'

"I now know something of the sensations of my rabbit-brothers, when the shooting season commences. Just at that moment, I remembered that I had not said a word to our chaplain, our dear, good chaplain, before starting on this expedition. I regretted this, but at the same time I did not know what I could have said to him.

"We reached our last shelters in this way. The Lieutenant joined me in my hole. He was laughing like a lunatic, but I was not laughing at all.

"'Marteau! Brigadier Marteau!' I called out. There was no reply.

"'Good Heavens! Had he been hit at the last hole?'

"'Marteau!' I called again and a voice that sounded a long way off replied, 'Captain!'

"'Are you whole, my boy?'

"'Yes, Captain.'

"'Well played then! Now listen. The tree that lies across the road is fifty yards from us. We are going to run to it at full speed, jump over it, and lie down behind it to get our breath again. The Lieutenant will lead off.'

"De Zaeydydt started and bullets whizzed through the air and exploded. He reached the tree, got mixed up in the branches, and rolled on the ground. I thought he had been hit and I shuddered. He got up again, cleared the tree, and disappeared. I said to myself, 'My dear boy, you are too short to scale that. You had better go round the tree again and the house.' 'Marteau,' I called out, 'I am going to start. Follow me.' I sprang out. Marteau followed me and there was a shower of bullets, but our hour had not yet come—and we got through safely.

"We were very soon in the French trenches and the soldiers welcomed us heartily. They had not expected to see us again. Our return journey, from the time we had seen the first bullet to the last one, had taken an hour and twenty minutes. Ah, I forgot to tell you that we had taken notes on the map and from the last 'e' of Kaestelhoek, there was a gleam from a Boche battery. That battery will hear from us to-morrow!"

The beefsteak and the coffee now put in an appear-

ance, and our Captain started on his meal like a wolf that had been starving for a fortnight in the snow. He is now sleeping and I am noting down this souvenir of the war, by the side of a fire which is smoking badly, as it is raining and raining outdoors. . . .

December 6, 1914. Great joy at our battery. Our Captain has received the Order of Leopold for his fine reconnaissance, November 28, 1914, on the Yser.

CHAPTER XXX

The Irony of Fate

**BY M. SADSAWSKA, CIVIC GUARD, MOTORCYCLIST OF THE 1ST
LINE REGIMENT**

WE were occupying the Dixmude Sector. Our trenches were hollowed out in the road which skirts the Yser, and the Regiment was sheltering in the centre of a vast horseshoe-shaped curl, traced by the river among the meadow grasses. The scenery was dolefully sad. Beyond a row of century-old trees, or rather of poor trunks of trees bewailing their scathed branches, which seemed to be mounting guard around our shelters, the ruins of a railway bridge stood out, half hidden in the water. On the embankment, surrounded by broken and twisted telegraph poles, and festoons of wires and cables all mixed up, lay a powerful locomotive, which had been overturned, so that its wheels were in the air. The melancholiness of the site did not disturb our equanimity at all. We were full of hopefulness and quite ready to march on towards the piles of fallen roofs, gaping houses, and tottering walls of strange shapes, which now constituted Dixmude, our old Flemish city. In the misty twilight, it seemed to us as though the poor town were stretching out its mutilated arms to us, and as though the murmur of the wind in the ruins were hailing us.

"Courage, courage, come!" it seemed to say.

Alas! the few hundred yards of verdure, which our thoughts and our wishes cleared only too willingly, hid the entrenchments and the redoubts of the enemy. Every night, the bravest of our men started out patrolling, endeavouring to discover the barbed wire, the ambushes, and the traps set for us. Sergeant Renson had specially distinguished himself for his daring and his *sang-froid*. He was naturally of an adventurous nature and was an excellent soldier. In spite of his mature age, he had joined the colours as a volunteer at the very beginning of the war.

He was anxious to find out whether some information he had obtained on a preceding expedition was exact, as it was very difficult on these ink-black nights to distinguish the real from the imaginary. He, therefore, expressed a wish to carry out a reconnaissance alone, and by daylight, in the direction of the enemy's lines. "I am not afraid of death," he said to his chiefs. "I have always lived in my own way and I now want to carry out this plan. I am free to risk my own skin and, as I am forty-two years old, I should not be any great loss." He was finally allowed to do as he wished.

He went along a narrow, long passage, until he came to the edge of the Yser, just where a few planks formed a raft. This means of transport was invaluable at night, but could not be used by daylight, as the enemy was on the watch. Renson could not swim. That did not trouble him and he crossed the current clinging to a cable. Accustomed as he was to all kinds of difficulties, this was mere child's play to him. He reached the other side, slipped into a big sack

covered with grass and flowers, and, under this mantle of verdure, crawled along dexterously.

Our emotion was intense in the trenches. All eyes were watching him, there was not a single loophole unoccupied.

Under the rays of the sun, we saw this moving grass crossing the meadow. It advanced, fell back, turned, stopped, appeared and disappeared, according to the undulations of the soil. Our hero was gaining ground. He was observing in his own defiant way, braving death itself. Nothing daunted him, nothing seemed to affect him. He was there, moving about in front of the enemy's line. Our hearts were beating wildly. Every time that a bullet whizzed along, it was anguish to us, and each minute seemed eternal.

Finally Renson turned round and, slowly and methodically, began to wend his way back. After a few yards more he would be in safety. We saw him on the crest of the bank. He glided into the water, crossed the stream, entered the narrow passage, and was soon back in the trenches, contented and happy, bringing with him valuable information. And this man, who had thus braved death, laughed heartily, as he gave us flowers from the German trenches. He then went to his shelter and prepared his report, tracing in full detail the daring itinerary he had chosen. The Commander questioned him on some point and, in order to explain better and to show the exact spot, they both approached a loophole in a communication trench. The Sergeant pointed with his finger to the spot in the meadow where the enemy was observing. A few seconds later and he was moving away. . . . Malediction!

There was a cruel whizzing sound and Renson was

dead. His skull had been pierced and he fell to the ground, the earthen wall bespattered with his generous blood.

At Alveringhem, in a peaceful country cemetery, in a grave covered with flowers and surmounted by a large cross, lies Adjutant Renson, Knight of the Order of Leopold II. who died for his country.

CHAPTER XXXI

Observers

BY ARTILLERY CAPTAIN M . . . C . . .

LEANING on my beam, I looked out into the night. It was a beautiful winter night, dreamy and peaceful. A vague gleam of moonlight hovered over the serene space, touching the fleecy clouds which were floating in the sky. And yet everything was sad with an infinite sadness.

From the summit on which I was perched, I looked out on every side on an immense horizon, and on every side it was a desert of death and desolation. In front of me were the Germans. Five hundred yards separated us from their outposts and that was the only side where there was no water. To the right, to the left, and behind us was the inundation, a great humid street, which, as far as the eye could see, shone strangely under the wan moonbeams, a weird shroud, covering, in its icy folds, thousands of corpses buried in the mud. Here and there, a dark spot could be seen in the water. It was all that remained of a farm, a charred, crumbling skeleton, or there was a dead beast breaking through the winding-sheet, or a human corpse turning its grimacing face to the moon. There were two, not far away from me, that I knew well.

For some months, they had been my daily companions. The first one was a German with a ravaged face, showing all its teeth in a horrible grin. The other one was a Belgian. Only the face emerged and the water splashed round it, leaving green shreds on its grey cheeks. A dark bird was poised on its nose, pecking at its gnawed eye sockets. Oh, shades of heroes! Can the glory that surrounds you with its halo not cover the remains of your poor profaned bodies?

There was a deadly calm and the cold wind made the trembling reeds rustle. Every breeze brought me a whiff of fulsome decay. Nothing broke the silence, except the funereal croaking of the birds of prey and the wail of the sea-gulls, which kept hovering in long flights over the deserted space. Oh, the sadness and the infamy of war! This then is your work, oh brutal and barbarous force, the rights of which men dare in our days still affirm and glorify!

Presently, some stealthy footsteps were to be heard. It was the guard being relieved. On the long footbridge, which was all that united our men with the outpost, a line of silent figures passed. A flash was to be seen, lighting up the darkness, and this was immediately followed by about twenty shots. The troop passed underneath my observation post. There was a fresh flash, and a bullet struck the wall under my feet. There was a cry followed by a long groan. It was a wounded man. He was carried away and the others went on to occupy the trenches.

Our order here had been to hold out to the very death. Retreat was impossible anyhow. To be convinced of this, one had only to look at the immense

stretch of water which separated us from our first lines, that dark band in the distant horizon.

The change of guard was scarcely finished when I heard a well-known strain coming from afar. It was a "saucepan" on its way: "Ou-ou-ou-ou! . . ." It was a fifteen calibre.

"Boom!" It exploded five yards away from me, covering me with mud. It was the moment when every man crouches down in his shelter, but, for the observer, it was the moment to see something and to get up higher, if possible, in order to gaze out at the land around. A second shot was to be heard and, so far, I had seen nothing. An infernal noise shook the building under me. That was charming. I sent my two aids to get under cover and I fixed a certain spot in the darkness. Ah, there was a gleam of light. Quick, I had to place it, whilst the projectile was on its way. This was aimed too far. It passed like a whirlwind over my head. Quick with the telephone! Good, we are going to reply. Thirty seconds later, a volley started from us, and now the concert began in earnest. An enemy battery answered our firing. On our side, a second one was brought into action, and this bombarded the German post in front of me. Presently, there was a deafening noise on all sides. I could no longer hear the German projectiles, but red flashes and formidable shocks warned me that we were coming in for it.

I shouted my observations to the telephonist, who could scarcely hear me a storey lower. Finally the battery which was firing on us was reduced to silence. Others went on firing, but slackened down and, at the end of an hour, there was dead silence again, broken only by bullets which, from

one trench to the other, were fired in search of victims.

When my time had expired, I went down below and was surprised to see my brave Liénart at the side of the ladder. He had been observing too. Instead of getting under cover, during the storm, he had come up to help in case of need. As to the telephonist, Cornez, I found him crouching down near his apparatus. "No chance of going to sleep here!" he said, on seeing me. And as it was his turn, he went up to take my place.

I threw myself down on my "flea sack" (the name answered to the reality in this case) and I slept the sleep of the observer, which had now become a habit with me. That is, I had one ear closed and the other listening to every sound. I kept my boots on, my pistol and cartridge case at my side, and my carbine within reach.

Suddenly, a bullet passed quite near, with that special click peculiar to shots fired at a short distance. A volley of shots then came, flattening themselves against the walls. We were all quickly on the alert. I went to look out at the observation post. It was probably an enemy patrol wandering about. Three men offered to go out in search of this and quickly started off, crawling along in the darkness. A few shots were exchanged and then all was quiet. The German patrol had withdrawn.

When I returned to my post, I felt suddenly chilly. I lighted a few pieces of wood in my brick oven and cooked three sweet potatoes over the cinders. This had been our usual meal since we had been at this observation post.

Gradually, whilst the wood was crackling and Cornez, who had been relieved, was snoring near me, I began to think of my home and of my old parents, who were watching and waiting so far away. I thought, too, of the beloved convent which I had left for this war, and of the strange contrast between this adventurous life and the serene life of the cloister.

For five months, we had been going from ruin to ruin in the midst of the inundation, trying to find a fresh post among the putrid waters, as soon as the shells had reduced the preceding one to a heap of ruins. A hundred times death had hovered over us, and a hundred times shells had paid us their gracious visits, in the very rooms in which we were living. It was all in vain, though, for we were "vaccinated."

As to our diet, it was worthy of Robinson Crusoe. What did it all matter! We were inured now to hunger, thirst, cold, and weariness. The worst of everything was the rain. It was all in vain that we struggled to protect our shelter. The bombardment soon played havoc with the roof and then the water was hopeless. It was no use thinking of sleep. Drop by drop, the rain would first come through a crack in the ceiling. . . . "Toc! . . . toc! . . . toc!" . . . We would put a basin down for it. A second little streamlet would commence. Down would go our saucepan for that. Then other streamlets would begin, and we would follow them all up with receptacles. We changed the places of our mattresses. It was all in vain, as very soon the deluge began again. Among all this ceaseless spotting, each drop competed with the other in making the clearest sound and the quickest drip: "Ticlictacpictoc" . . .

"Tu-u-u-u-û!" the one in the middle would say, for

it had suddenly found a way to make one steady stream. That one certainly deserved the prize, and we gave it the honour of having the big saucepan to receive it. Finally, we resigned ourselves to the inevitable. We had our feet in a pool, water on our clothes, water on our heads, gradually dripping down our necks, and our mattresses full of water. There was only one thing left for us to do, and that was to put on our big coats and to let it go on raining, to shut our eyes and dream (with the joyful concert of the drip, drip going on) of all that life has that is beautiful, great, and good, provided all this be consecrated to some holy cause.

Just as dawn was appearing, I had an agreeable visit in my lonely hermitage. My old comrade, Lieutenant de W——, had come here to observe in his turn. He was accompanied by his two faithful followers, Quartermaster Snysters, an old Antwerp friend, who had gone through the Retreat with me, and Gunner Frentzen. How am I to describe Frentzen? Imagine a tall, bony, roughly-hewn Flemish man of six feet, with a surly look and two small, keen eyes, constantly lighting up with a smile. Frentzen had been taken prisoner by the Germans. The first night, he went and found the sentinel, killed him with his fists, and then, smoking his pipe, returned calmly to his Lieutenant. My two Flemish friends are inseparable. They insult each other from morning to night and are always in search of some adventurous exploit. They go roving about in the midst of the inundations, right to the outposts, under the very noses of the Boches.

The newcomers received a hearty welcome and de W—— and I stirred up, not only the fire, but all our

old memories, by way of cheering ourselves. Whilst we were chatting, his two companions had been laying their plans. Frentzen came ambling up to us, scratching the back of his neck.

"Lieutenant," he began, "if we could just have a look in at the little farm over yonder?"

"The farm? That one? Why, it's full of Boches."

"The 'Bosses'!" exclaimed Frentzen, with superb disdain. "We can put a few bullets into them."

De W—— and I roared with laughter at his expression.

"Right," said my friend. "You can go, but be prudent."

Snysters favoured me with a wink that was full of eloquence and shrugged his shoulders slightly, and the two men set out on their expedition.

An hour later they returned, wet through, covered with mud, and accusing each other of being milksops, cowards, and using various other complimentary epithets, such as only the Flemish language can render with sufficient emphasis. Frentzen's pocket had been pierced by a bullet. Snysters had had one through his cap. A minute or two later, Snysters went out of the room and Frentzen came a few steps nearer and remarked, confidentially:

"Lieutenant, Snysters, he doesn't know what it means to be afraid of anything, but he's a bit . . ."

Frentzen winked and touched his own forehead.

"You understand, Lieutenant."

"Yes, yes, I know him well."

Frentzen went away and when Snysters came back, he drew his chair up and remarked:

"Lieutenant, that Frentzen's a chap with plenty of nerve, but," hereupon he tapped his forehead with

a knowing expression, "a bit touched here, you know."

"Yes, yes, I know. . . ."

A little while later, they went off again, arm in arm, insulting each other more than ever, but on the lookout for fresh adventures.

The bombardment recommenced at an early hour. It began with volleys of 77's, those miserable, ridiculous 77's. They come along as though they are going to smash everything before them, and they finish with a poor little "petch" and a bit of pipe smoke.

Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.

Cornez, my youngster from Liége, gave a whistling accompaniment. Presently the song changed and the 105 arrived. The planks of wood which served as window-shutters were flung inside the room. In front of the building, the footbridge was pulverised. That was the fifth time this had happened. There would be no chance of going outside and keeping our feet dry now. Our guns answered.

I looked out at the firing zone and was pleased to see that the enemy battery was well encircled. It continued in spite of this, and as a matter of fact, we were no less encircled than they were.

I went downstairs to go to the telephone. I was only just there, when a formidable explosion flung a whole collection of bricks and rubbish behind me and I was in the midst of a cloud of dust. I looked up and saw that there was nothing left of my observation post. A huge breach in the wall showed where the brutal visitor had just entered. De W—— came running to me, delighted to see me whole.

"I fancy there are too many prayers being said

for you," he remarked, "for the shells to be able to touch you."

"I have been vaccinated," I replied.

After all this, we had a good night's work before us, as we were obliged to build the place up again. And that was not all. That satanic 105 was warming up with its work. The footbridge was smashed in several places. It would be difficult for the relief at night, and, by way of a climax, the telephone was silent, as the wire was cut. Good, we were completely isolated from the rest of the world. For the moment there was nothing to be done, so we sat down and began talking, knowing that there was every possibility of our conversation finishing up above, in the presence of St. Peter.

Towards noon, there was a lull and we were able to repair the telephone wire. As soon as we were in communication once more with our comrades in the rear, the first thing they asked was whether we were all dead.

We then cooked some more sweet potatoes, put the platform up again, and then the fête began once more, and this time continued until night.

Just when it was beginning to grow dark, our telephone wires broke again. We were now getting volleys of shrapnel, which continued all the time, covering the ground with hurricanes of lead and iron. This foreshadowed an attack. I thought I would go and have a look at the trenches. I kept slipping on the mud and went splashing through pools of water and tumbling into holes, made recently by the shells, whilst overhead the wretched volleys kept bursting with their sharp, dry din and, at my feet, the bullets pierced the ground.

In front of us, nothing could be seen moving. The Lieutenant in command of this post was on his guard, as he expected an attack. The night was getting quickly heavy and dark, so that very soon we could distinguish nothing ten yards away from us. Nothing could be seen at all but the weird flashes which kept lighting up the darkness on all sides, and these seemed to be getting more and more furious. "There is nothing to fear, at present," I said to my comrade, "but as soon as the firing slackens, we must keep a sharp lookout."

"Lieutenant, Lieutenant!" I suddenly heard from my post.

"What is the matter?"

"Come quick!"

I returned as quickly as possible. There was no light, but a huge hole in the ceiling which let in the cold air. On the floor, among all the rubbish, lay a man. I turned my light on the face and saw that it was my brave friend, Snysters. He was covered with blood which was still smoking; a huge fragment of shell had pierced his heart. I examined him to see whether he were really dead and I offered up a prayer to God for his heroic soul. I then went in search of the others. They had taken refuge in a trench. De W. was wounded in the wrist. Cornez was still dazed by the commotion, and Frentzen was growling and swearing in a low voice.

"Filthy Bosses! Wretched pigs! Poor Snysters! Curse them, curse them!"

Towards 9 o'clock, the bombardment suddenly slackened and the Germans extended their firing range. A minute later, there was shooting from our trenches, and the Germans fired back from quite near

to us. Our shooting then became hurried and agitated. Attention now for the attack! I took a fuse and then went to our line. What was the meaning of the disorder? We were just being relieved. "Halt! let no one move until further orders. Every man in the trenches."

I met the fresh commander of the post and we concerted for a few seconds. Whilst he threw a fuse from the trench to the left, I was to look out with my field-glasses at the trench to the right, which appeared to be the one threatened. The fuse was thrown and the whole country round was bathed in a bright light. There was nothing to be seen. Not a man appeared. But as I knew every detail of the land by heart, I could distinguish, thirty yards in front of us, a long line of little heaps that had been newly made.

The Boches were hollowing out the ground and were burying themselves ready for the assault. I stopped the firing and ordered absolute silence. In the midst of the darkness, we could then hear distinctly the rough, brief orders that the Commander of the attack was giving in a low voice. Ah, the rascals, they had come as near to us as that! Good, we will give them something for their trouble. With the agreement of the officer in command, I had one of the two machine-guns brought from the other salient. I then looked out again with my field-glasses; a faint moonbeam now lighted up the ground. I could see the little heaps and also the spades that were moving the earth. Presently a shadow could be seen standing up and then two, three, ten figures. I indicated the spot to the gunner and he took aim.

"Fire!"

The horrible engine of war did its work and, in a

trice, it had mown down all these figures. Five minutes later, some more figures rose and these too were brought down by the machine-gun. An enemy machine-gun now replied to us, but, fortunately, it fired too high and too much to the left. For three hours, we kept this game up. The Germans were nailed to the ground, and each time they attempted to get up, they were swept down again by our firing. Finally, they retired and disappeared, crawling along in the darkness.

We then went back to our post. A never-to-be-forgotten sight awaited us there. Snysters was lying in the middle of the room. His face was turned to the sky and he was sleeping his long sleep under a beam of light. Just above his head, by the gaping breach in the ceiling, the moon shed a white ray which surrounded his face with a halo of glory. It looked very pure and very peaceful, and left all the rest of his body hidden in dense darkness. I have never seen a finer mortuary than the one which the heavens had thus raised to this martyr to his country. And it seemed to me that the soul of the hero had risen gloriously, in this beautiful ray of light, to the kingdom above.

An hour later, the body was taken away. Frentzen wrapped it in his own cloak, because it was a better one than that of the dead man, and he carried it out alone. Whilst he was digging a grave, swearing all the time between his teeth, I noticed that he kept furtively wiping away his tears.

When he had finished his task, he came back to me.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I knew it would happen to him. I always told him so. He was always swearing

like the devil, it was sure to happen to him. . . .
Damn! Damn!"

And swearing away now for two men, instead of one, he went on growling quietly.

Before the dawn, we had again repaired the damage. And then the day broke, rosy and smiling, in the limpid horizon, lighting up a pile of German corpses and of ruins in the midst of our own ruins. And when I had gone up to my post once more, a blackbird came and perched on the top of the roof and warbled his gay song to the echoes. I understood then that only one thing matters in our existence, and that is to so order one's soul that, high up in the ideal azure, it shall sing its song in spite of the storm. It must be a soul which, free and strong, shall continue its own way, always ready for any struggle, always ready for martyrdom, and always ready to rise heavenwards!

March, 1915.

CHAPTER XXXII

A Patrol

BY ARTILLERY CAPTAIN M— C—

EVERYTHING looked gay that morning at the outposts. The big, radiant sun, saturating the blue sky, made the sheet of water sparkle, as it rippled along with silvery spangles right up to the enemy lines. The ruins of the red roofs and picturesque white gables had quite a festive air, reflected in the lake which now bathed them. They seemed surprised to find themselves in the midst of these moving meadows, instead of in the green meadows in which they had been accustomed to slumber. In the horizon could be seen tints of periwinkle and lilac, which seemed to be smiling to the deep blue of the sky.

The reality of things was by no means so jovial as this charming setting. The violet, huge trees, which looked so beautiful over yonder, concealed batteries which would presently send out death amongst us. The gay, white gables had little holes for the wicked guns and machine-guns, and were in readiness. And, under the silvery sky, the greenish lake, there were corpses half eaten, and harvests rotting in the water. Unhappy being who ventured out into the innumerable

He would be caught in the deep, slimy mud, in the barbed wire, in the numberless canals which furrowed the whole district, and which were treacherously concealed under great tufts of reeds. In a very short time, bullets and shrapnels would whistle round his ears as warning precursors of death.

Just at the edge of the inundation, two soldiers were talking together, as they examined the big farm emerging from the water, six hundred yards to the north of the post.

"I tell you there is no one inside. There's nothing left but the loopholes."

"One never knows with these wretches."

"The only thing is to go and see."

"The Sergeant says that the Major, he'd like to know what's inside that farm."

"Well then the only thing is to go and see."

"Come on then."

They went in search of the Lieutenant.

"Lieutenant, can we go out on patrol round the N—— Farm and have a look to see whether there's any Boches inside?"

"On patrol . . . in a boat you mean?"

"We'd make our plans, Lieutenant."

The Lieutenant was silent a minute. That farm puzzled him too, but he was anxious about the lives of his men.

"It's too dangerous," he replied, and soon after he moved away. The two men looked at each other.

"He didn't say No."

"He said it was dangerous. We know that."

"Let's go then, shall we?"

"Yes, we'll go."

They spotted a big tub lying in a yard. They

emptied it, put it on the water, and set off, each one armed with his gun and a pole. The first one, on getting in, had some difficulty in balancing himself, but for the second one it was still more difficult. The tub tossed about, threatening to turn upside down. Finally they managed to steady it, and they then set sail. With one pole they pushed against the bank, and with the other they steadied themselves in the muddy lake. The tub then moved on heavily and awkwardly, leaning first suddenly to the right, then to the left, and then spinning round an invisible rotation axis. Our patrol was now upset into the water, and the confounded tub, as though proud of its exploit, danced about on the ripples with a contented air.

Our two poor rabbits had a struggle. They managed to keep their guns above water and, on coming to land, they looked at each other and burst out laughing. It was evidently impossible for two of them to get along in that tub. They went in search of something else and presently came back with a trough. This was put on the water by the side of the tub. They each took their place, with the manoeuvres of tight-rope walkers, and the squadron set out to sea. The two ships sailed along in the most alarming way. The tub, not satisfied with leaning down, first on one side and then on the other, jumped about with the agility of a stag, in the direction of all the cardinal points, and seemed to take the greatest pleasure in spinning round with such speed that it looked as though it were wound up and would never stop again. The unfortunate sailor plunged his pole in the mud. The obstinate skiff calmed down, pretended to stop, thought it over a second, and then started off in the

contrary way, with its horrible spinning movement. The pole was plunged in again, farther on. The tub stopped short, darted into an eddy, and disappeared in the water. We, who were watching, uttered a cry of fear. Ah, the tub was back again, it had only been a pretence. It went on its way once more, turning about all the time, more and more turbulent and more and more incoherent.

As to the trough, that was still more awful. It made me giddy to look at it. The pilot's pole had to do service as pole, oar, and beam. As it was absolutely incapable of performing all these functions at the same time, the trough had fine sport and made the most of it. It went along with such bounds and leaps that each time it seemed as though it were turning right over and plunging under the water. It went on more and more quickly, always by fits and starts, and in the most irregular way possible. The wretched pole had to keep striking the water in every way possible, splashing and dabbling in an agitated, incoherent manner, and so quickly that it looked like the fingers of a compass out of order.

Its poor Captain, who was still in the trough, was tossed about all the time. He never ceased to brandish his giddy pole, except when he was emptying the water out of his death-trap with a saucepan.

The two men were making headway, nevertheless, with the tub turning round and round, and the trough leaping and bounding, both of them dancing wild waltzes. The tub, thanks to a few vigorous strokes, got ahead. The trough followed with great difficulty, but, presently, its pilot managed to set it going and, with a few energetic strokes with his pole-oar, he too gained ground, came up with his rival, who

appeared to be in distress, and then passed by him with ease.

They were a good distance from us now and we held our breath as we watched them. One or the other kept disappearing every minute, apparently sinking straight to the bottom. Finally the trough, which was certainly the stronger of the two, approached the coast! A few more strokes of the oar and it had landed at the edge of the green islet. As to the tub, it leapt, rocked, and spun round in a way that would have made a demon shudder. Finally, it ran aground on a mud bank. The man landed in the water, wallowed in the mud, freed himself, set his barque afloat again, but it was quite a drama to re-embark in it, in the midst of the "sea." He managed this, though, and he finally crossed without any further accident. We breathed freely once more.

The two patrols examined the land, consulted for a moment, and then advanced towards the mysterious farm. There was no sign of life, but we trembled for them, as we knew the ways of the Boches. They were now within a hundred yards of the quiet-looking building, when, suddenly, they were saluted by bullets from invisible holes. The farm was occupied then. The object of their expedition was attained and we expected that our men would now come crawling back. Not at all! They were crawling, but it was in the direction of the German trench, which ran to the right of the farm along the strip of land. They did not care to have taken such a long trip for nothing and they thought they might as well see whether the trench was occupied too. They approached it slowly and cautiously, looking up occasionally to see whether anything moved. They reached the parapet,

stopped a second, and then, striding over it, disappeared. At my side I heard a man whisper: "They must be mad!"

"Ping! Pang!" we heard in the trench. This time the daring fellows must certainly have been taken prisoners. Not so, though. We saw them suddenly emerge, like two jack-in-the-boxes, jump down the bank, and crawl on all fours, with the speed of two lizards running through the grass. Only their guns were then visible, swaying with a quick movement like two pendulums. The men themselves were so flat down in the mud that they soon looked like two lumps of mud being moved by an invisible hand. From time to time, after a sharp volley, one of them would remain still and apparently lifeless. Had he been hit, we wondered? No, he was only pretending to be dead and, a minute later, he started again, going along more quickly still. After a good quarter of an hour of this alarming chase, they reached the water. They waited five minutes and then, with a jump, each one seized his "boat," got into it, and once more set off waltzing, twisting, and turning, under a shower of bullets. Twenty times over they escaped death and finally, wet through, perspiring, covered with slime and moss, as sturdy as two Neptunes, they landed, and going straight up to their Lieutenant, laughing as they went, they gave in the result of their expedition.

"The farm is occupied and the trench too," was all they said.

"I can see that for myself, on looking at you two, by Jingo!"

The officer, torn between anger and admiration, did not know whether he ought to blame them or

praise them. He did a little of each and our dare-devils, a trifle ashamed of being "pitched into," but very well satisfied with their exploit, went off to wash their clothes and dry themselves in the sun, which was now smiling on them.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Death March

BY DOCTOR DUWEZ, ARMY SURGEON TO THE REGIMENT OF
GRENADIERS

THERE is very little improvement in the situation. The Germans are holding the trenches from Het-Sas as far as Steenstraete. Their attacks are getting more frequent. To-night, the Zouaves are to attack Lizerne.

At the present moment, all our batteries are raging. It is six o'clock in the evening. The 75's are yelling at short intervals. Our seven-fives, with the noise of anvils, send out their volleys into the vibrating air, with a piercing, shrill whistle.

We saw Pypegale, with its ruined houses. English couriers, concealed here and there, watched us pass by. To the left, the green plain stretched out before us as far as the tall trees of Kemmelbeeck. They were standing in groups, with their branches still bare. Farther away were hedges and little gardens, and in the corner, where the valley is cut into two by the road, in the midst of the green coppices, were pear-trees covered with blossom. We could see the red roofs of the little village of Zuydschoote, with its white church all charred.

The big German shells were falling all the time on

these wooded places. Great black convolutions rose in the air in balls, or, if the shell burst in the houses, the pink dust of the pulverised tiles could then be seen. We could hear the roofs cracking, the walls giving way, and the beams falling down.

Above the road occupied by the column, the white clouds of the little shrapnels were rising. They stood out clearly against the clear blue sky. The wind stretched them gently out, changed their shapes, and wafted them towards us. Farther still, the horizon was gradually veiled in a mist composed of smoke, rubbish, and dust.

On our left was the farm, to which this road led. We passed through the devastated barn. Balls began to whistle and crash against the walls. The windows had no panes and the rooms were full of rubbish and rotten straw. A Grenadier dragged himself along towards us, his face drawn and his forehead covered with cold perspiration. His trousers were sticking to one of his legs with blood, and, on cutting them away, a big wound was to be seen with a dark background, formed by the muscles, and a long, red stream which was trickling down. Next arrived a Zouave, short and broad-backed. He came along merrily, supporting his arm which he showed us.

"I think they've broken it this time, the pigs!" he said, with a Marseilles accent. "They had me, anyhow." He spoke with great eloquence, gesticulating energetically. When his arm was dressed, he turned suddenly pale and was silent, as he leaned for support against the wall.

We looked out to see where we should cross the fiery barrier. Every man gave his opinion on the matter. The Zouaves over yonder were going along,

in single file, near the hedges, in the direction of Zuydschoote. We could see their yellow jackets and the blue veiling covering their *chéchias*. Holding their guns in their hands, they were advancing cautiously, hiding like Indians on the war-path.

As we approached Kemmelbeeck, the bullets whistled, snapped, and whined more than ever. We saw the footbridges, the sentinel's niche, all covered with grass, and the big, bare trees, with their outstretched arms. All along the coppice, in the ditches, the Grenadiers, with dark coats and red badges on their collars, could be seen lying down among the Zouaves in their light costumes. To our right, the farm in ruins, with nothing but fragments of walls, level with the ground, was hiding its bricks in the grasses. The zone here was fired on to such a degree that it was wiser to hasten along. We had to cross the road in order to reach the little guard-house. This was sheltering a whole group of soldiers, who were in the garden taking refuge near the walls and among the green plants and tufts of jonquils. Their uniforms stood out in vivid colours, all the more vivid as the sun was sinking in the horizon.

The little house was intact and this was a miracle. The men were chattering like magpies. They were relating all kinds of exploits amidst the din of the battle. Those near the walls were crouching down close to each other. The others were lying flat down. The wounded had taken refuge inside the house.

Two small rooms were full, and the wounded were lying down on straw. One of these, a Grenadier, was near the wall. He was dying from a bullet in his head. A Zouave, crouching in a corner, was pressing his arm against his breast. He did not speak and was

gazing with a fixed stare in front of him. Others were tossing about and moaning. The floor was strewn with bandages covered with blood, with scraps of dirty uniforms, with knapsacks, guns, and bayonets. A hand that was stretched out towards me had the fingers almost torn off. A young Corporal, very plain-looking, with dark hair, his moustache cut in brush fashion, and with twinkling eyes, was joking at his own expense, as he pointed to his wound. "What am I going to do," he asked, "for I cannot sit down again?" In the adjoining room, there were more wounded men, all crowded together. The army chaplain, in one corner, was giving the absolution. Two officers were taking their supper at a table, whilst reading their orders. Coming out from under this table, could be seen the iron-tipped boots of a dying man.

"Doctor, Doctor, am I going to be left here?"

Moans could be heard on all sides and everyone was talking at the same time. It was a mixture of languages, in which slang and Flemish predominated.

"My bandage is torn, Doctor; I am losing all my blood!"

There was a poor fellow whose leg had been nearly blown off; another one, bent double, was leaning his head against the wall. Another man had his head bandaged and bleeding.

"I was advancing," he said, "the first of the section, when all at once I felt a shock."

He gesticulated with his dry hand, trying to explain what had happened. There were many others in a similar plight. It was getting dark and the red wounds looked black in the darkness, and the expression in the men's eyes seemed more profound. A candle was

lighted and the shadows on the wall now grew longer and looked enormous. A wounded man, in a corner of the room, had just ceased suffering. His eyes were wide open staring fixedly at the room.

From the windows, the green light of the shrapnels and the red flames of the shells lit up the darkness with sudden flashes. Tiles kept falling and lumps of earth thudding against the roof. A strange heaviness weighed on everyone, numbing the brain and drying the eyes. Was it fatigue or torpor? No, it was something indescribable.

Outside, the human bunch was still there. To the right could be heard the regular *tac-tac* of a machine-gun.

"Ah the animals!" cried a Zouave, shaking his fist. "We shall have them, though, just now, with the bayonet!"

Shells went whizzing over the house, exploding in the coppices with a whooping noise. Then came the heavier, jerky whizz of the big "Fifteens," *Ram . . . ram . . . ram!* They exploded and kept coming in threes, at regular intervals. From one minute to another the great glow might appear, the final destruction which would send all our human islet to its death.

Our first line trenches were over yonder. There was the Lizerne Mill. The village was to the right. The ground looked black, the plain was lighted by the moon, so that one could see a heap of bricks which reminded one of the Mill. In October, we had seen it in all its glory, with its sails in the form of a cross. Through the cloud of dust which rose from the battle-field, lighted up by the shrapnels which kept rending the darkness, and in the midst of the wan

light, the scene before us looked like a dream picture. We could see the spot we wanted to reach. With our eyes fixed on it, we went along as though hypnotised. Over there was the hill-top that had been laid waste, the accursed spot where craters had been made in every direction.

Bullets were whizzing through the air and clods of earth kept falling with heavy thuds. Fragments of shells kept burying themselves with a whirring sound. Onward, onward, we must get there! As we advanced, the outline of the spot we were aiming at grew bigger and bigger. We kept stumbling, falling down and getting up again. Now we saw the house all in ruins, the hill on which the mill had stood before it fell in. A shelter had now been dug in the hill. I pushed the door open, a whiff of hot air nearly choked me, the light dazzled me and, in the heavy atmosphere, I could scarcely recognise any faces. There were about twenty men there, some wounded, who were waiting, and officers who were there at their posts. We had to go still farther on than this. We could stay only long enough to exchange a few words, and then, shaking hands, we said "Adieu! Good luck!" How many of us would never return!

It was now the last stage of our journey. There was a communication trench here. We glided along, sheltering near the house, dark shadows in the night. The trench had been blocked and was almost destroyed. We had to climb on heaps of sand, stride over, jump and then let ourselves fall again into the holes. It was a labyrinth of fragments of walls, and of moving earth, above which tall, branchless trees stood up like black skeletons. Shells kept coming regularly, every quarter of a minute. Between every

explosion we ran, hurrying forward. Our hearts were beating fast. The bullets kept snapping. We did not think of death. Our one idea was to arrive, to advance. It was a deadly race. And then the odour that rose to our nostrils, at the same time as the odour of the powder, became stronger and stronger.

At last we came to Yperlée, to the footbridge. Only a rush now and we shall be on sheltered ground.

The tree that used to be there is split up. Its dark branches were all intertwined as they fell, and we could see the white of its sap-wood, with its enormous prickles. On the ground were four Zouaves. One of them was crouching down, with his gun between his legs and his head on his chest. The others were lying down, as though they were asleep. And that terrible odour became persistent. Agreeable at first, something like jasmine, it finally became sickening. It had been pursuing us for a long time, and, at times, it was most violent. The band seemed to be tightening round our temples. Our eyes were burning and tears were running down our cheeks. There were little drops of moisture in the air which settled on us.

Here was the trench, and the moon made the shadows seem enormous. The sudden gleam from the shrapnels rent the darkness overhead. The shells yelled as they passed heavily along. It was as though they found it difficult to advance. Suddenly some "seventy-fives" rushed along. They ceased and then began again wildly. The horizon was brilliant with sudden flashes. In the distance we could hear the stifled "Boom!" of the big cannons, the bell-like sound of the 380 which went on and on. The cannon-ading became slower and we thought it was stopping, but, after a moment's silence, one cannon began

again, then another, and then all of them together. Our Grenadiers were there, lying on the parapets, crouching in the trenches, big, dark shadows on their still greyer sacks. They fired. Bullets smashed into the sacks, into the earth and the trees. Shadows could be seen gliding about, men bending double, with their guns in their hands. On the right, a great, red light was to be seen, gradually covering all the sky. Ypres was burning. The ruins of Ypres were in flames. The bullets sang and whined. Others plunged into the bluish darkness with a reverberating noise. They went a long way and then suddenly ended in the ground. They came from the front, from the back, from everywhere. A fuse came down from the sky, a green star lighting up the trench with an unnatural light, like a diabolical smile. The whizzing began again. Shrapnels burst with their greenish light, again and again, and all the time. It was a wonderful and terrible hour. Flanders was bleeding from all her veins. But no matter, the Germans did not pass!

CHAPTER XXXIV

Shelter D. A.

BY DR. DUWEZ, ARMY SURGEON TO THE REGIMENT OF
GRENADIERS

IN the low room of the farmhouse, with its dingy ceiling supported by oak beams, everyone was listening in silence. The Germans had lost Lizerne, but they were still holding out on this side of the water: Het-sas and Steenstraete. This evening, the Battalion was to occupy a transversal position, behind the telegraph pole opposite the bridge-head. The officers, in their dark uniforms, were standing up. In the dim light, their faces looked paler than usual. Their brass buttons and their stars shone. Through the curtains of the windows we could see the green landscape. Only those who had passed through the Lizerne hell could imagine the impression caused by the idea of returning to it.

All day long, the cannon had been roaring, making the window-panes rattle. A few shells had come as far as our farm and killed a Grenadier. I had seen him near the hedge. He was stretched on the ground, his skull broken in, his white face framed by the blood from his forehead. Not far from him the dry, ploughed ground had been lacerated. A man, spade in hand, was looking for the head of the shell.

Our departure took place in silence. In the dim light, our men's red badges stood out vividly. They went along in Indian file by a path in the wood. Their heavy tread could be heard as they crossed the footbridge. They marched on. The black farms, in the darkness, looked fantastic. There were hedges, rows of willow-trees, and desolate houses. The framework of only a few of these was still standing. Tiles cracked under our feet. Then there were paths on which our dark shadows fell side by side with the poplar trees. From time to time, we heard the clatter of a metal cup or a stealthy tread on the grass, like that of an animal going to the river at night. The moon shone very faintly and the stars looked like silver nails.

A few bullets sang round our ears. One of our fuses rushed into the darkness with a long, whistling sound. The white star stood out shining over the landscape and making it look elysian.

We now came to the trench, with its heaps of sacks and up-turned earth. The traces of the struggle were still visible. Whole trees had been felled down on the parapet and were now lying, split open, their beams in the air. We penetrated into a new domain, gliding along in the deep passages. From time to time a fuse came down with a greenish light and a graceful, curving movement. It lighted up the tops of the trees and then searched the coppices. The shadows moved about again, stretched themselves out and then again all was darkness, the darkness to which our eyes had once more to get accustomed. We saw some soldiers wearing blue coats among our men. They were the brave fellows of the 135th. We could scarcely distinguish them from the others. They

hollowed out niches for themselves in the bank and crouched right down in these shelters, with their heads almost buried in the bank. They were there *pêle-mêle*, the dead and the living. Those who were sitting had their guns between their legs and were dozing. We knocked against one of them in passing.

"What's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Are we going to the assault?" And he was up and ready at once.

The tall outlines of the trees now stood out against the sky. We had reached the entrance of the communication trench. Just as we were crossing the little bridge, something luminous burst over us and we suddenly heard the fizzling of a storm of bullets. We had only just time to lie down flat and wait till the hurricane was over. The darkness then returned. One by one, we entered the labyrinth of mud and of crumbling parapets. A prop had been made out of the ruins of a farmhouse, which had been razed to the ground. These ruins did not look like any other ruins. Among the dark coppices, the scattered stones looked like white patches.

Our shelter was composed of a number of small wooden boxes, half covered with earth. In the bluish light of night, our outlines looked enormous. The moon lighted up, with a vague gleam, this devastated space, where the shattered, broken-branched trees added their cataleptic attitudes to the general desolation. Around the shelters, many of which were no more than tangled rubbish, about fifteen dead bodies were lying crushed on the ground. In the background was the Lizerne Mill. A jagged outline could be seen standing out against the sky.

Our men were wandering about trying to find a

place. At the bottom of a hole, the yellowish light of a candle could be seen, but it was soon extinguished. The ambulance men were burying the nearest of the dead. The Chaplain, who looked like a dark shadow in the moonlight, offered up a prayer. It was in this spot that we were to live for the next three days.

Our men huddled together on planks of wood with a slight layer of straw. Each one rolled himself up in his blanket and wedged himself into his corner. Everyone was silent. Through the open door could be seen the pale blue of the sky with two stars shining in it. In the distance, the big cannons were booming all the time. We tried to go on sleeping as long as possible, stiff though we were. The sun had already risen. The square of the sky which could be seen through the open door had gradually become a square of light. Death had not come to us during the night.

The sun was warm and we lay down on the bare ground behind the shelter, like so many lizards. The kindly golden light chased away all bitterness and fatigue. Under our feet, the bodies which had only just been buried gave a sensation of elasticity to the ground. The full daylight took away the phantasmagorical appearance of everything, and our shelters appeared in their true aspect, wretched boxes, made of pinewood half covered with tufts of grass.

The ground all around us was hollowed out in enormous craters, several of which were quite close to us. A field all yellow with turnips in flower crowned the summit, the rest was nothing but brown earth.

A few men at work passed along by the hedge. One by one they ran along, bending nearly double. They passed near to us, making straight for the top of

the hill. Little clouds of dust, made by bullets, kept rising at their feet. Their coats could be seen mingling with the yellowish-green of the turnip field. They then disappeared among the flowers.

Towards two o'clock the cannonading commenced. The seventy-fives thundered without ceasing. Our seven-fives accompanied them. Very soon the Germans began to do their part, and their tens exploded with a noise that rent the air. Next came the wild-beast yelling of the shrapnels rushing on to the batteries, the dull noise of the heavy block-trains, the whizzing of our own shells, which passed quite near to us and then went on rapidly to lacerate our enemies in their dens. Then came the bell-like sound of the English howitzers, the fantastical dance of the seventy-five shells, striking their wild chords on the trenches, the yelling whistle of the heavy shells which soon began to fall on the plateau. They exploded near to us, with a heavy crashing din. The rubbish whirled round in the air with harmonious songs. The bursting of certain German shrapnels was accompanied by a hubbub like the cries of wounded men. And then once more came the big shells. The sky was darkened by the clouds of black dust which rose up in the air like waterspouts.

The planks of wood were riddled with fragments. The cannonading then diminished and finally ceased. What was going to happen next? We listened anxiously and then, suddenly, a machine-gun was to be heard. This meant the assault, and our hearts were full of anguish. We looked out into the distance, straight in front of us, sure, however, that we should see nothing. Then, all at once, by the communication trench, a whole mass of wounded men arrived. They

were pale and panting and many of them drenched to the bones.

"Oh the wretches, the wretches, they had us, Doctor! It was horrible. We had scarcely left the trench, when they mowed us down. Some of our men plunged into the water to save themselves, into that water over yonder, the stream, I don't know what you call it, and they have been drowned in that rot. Others who were wounded and were trying to get back into our lines were finished off by them, finished off, Doctor, by their machine-guns, men who were dragging themselves along on the ground."

The machine-gun was silent now. More and more wounded arrived, in little groups, pursued by the shooting. One of them had his face red with blood. There was blood and mud everywhere, and on all sides moans of pain. One poor fellow was sitting in a hole, with bullets in both feet and his arm shattered. He was holding his arm as one holds a baby, rocking it and uttering incomprehensible things, as he shook his head. There were about forty lying either at the back of the shelters or inside, *pêle-mêle*, amongst our men. They gradually became more calm and were quiet. Those who could go on farther started off one by one. The one who had been crying was now shivering in a corner. The darkness came on again gradually. The assault of the 135th had failed.

In the night, the dance began once more, and this time, through the chinks, we could see the red light of the explosions. Suddenly a shell made a breach over our heads.

"Is anyone hit?" we asked.

"No one," came the reply.

Another one came presently, and then others. We

heard them fall and the ground shook. We tried to go to sleep, but, with our hearts beating fast and our limbs cramped, sleep would not come. More shells arrived. We thought they were exploding farther away, but no, that one was nearer. Then another farther away and, after this, silence again. We were tired of hoping against hope and we all pulled our blankets up and covered our faces.

The dawn was slow in coming. There were no more illusions possible for us. As long as the Germans were on this side of the water, life would be unbearable for us. And yet it was a beautiful day and a bird was singing on the broken branch of a tree. It was so good to be alive!

Thanks to the shells round here, the graves were ready made. We put the Grenadiers and French who were in the neighborhood into them. Our domain was very limited, and was skirted on every side by death. Presently breakfast was served, bread and jam, cold coffee in aluminium goblets. These were the usual rations, for we had to live in spite of everything. We yawned as we looked out and saw the thin brown lines of the German trenches in front of us.

In the afternoon, the *aéroplanes* were flying about over our heads in the blue sky, and presently the azure road was riddled with white spots. We were all watching them, but we soon had to go in and take shelter, as the splinters fell about with a whirring sound. One of our machines then appeared in pursuit of the others and this was intensely exciting for us. It rushed along like a bird of prey, but unfortunately its victim had time to escape . . . and so the time passed.

Once more the dance began, and the noise, this time,

was formidable and uninterrupted. Again the big shells tore up the ground near us, flinging into the air enormous clouds which hid the light from us. The rubbish fell down like rain, the ground trembled, and our huts shook. The next one came along with a terrible, hissing sound, and then another and another. We wondered whether the cannon would never cease again. For days now, we had heard it like this. At last there was silence once more. We could scarcely believe it at first. The backs of our necks ached and our ears were on the alert. What was the meaning of this wonderful silence? We could not hear the machine-gun. Well, then . . . our assault must have succeeded. . . . We could not believe this. It was too good to be true. In spite of everything, our breasts were swelling with joy and the men burst out singing the *Marseillaise*.

Oh, if we could only know what had happened! Presently a soldier came our way.

"What's the news?" cried out our men. He looked at us in a dazed way, holding his metal cup in his hand.

"News of the assault?" he said. "It's been put off."

It was night and, on the Steenstraete side, there was a house in flames, throwing huge red lights on the sky. The fuses, with their ideal colouring, rose silently again in the air with their gentle curves. Our long serpents, with their golden spangles, rushed out into the darkness, letting a star of pale light fall in the air.

By gliding along, from shell hole to shell hole, it was possible to get as far as the mill. In the communi-

cation trench, a dark, crushed, charred body had sunk down. Farther on, there were paving stones that had been torn up and rubbish, from all sides, that had accumulated. The hillock was torn open and the opening led out to the light night. The shadows here were motionless and the very things looked dead. It was absolute solitude, a terrible picture of war, the strange domain of fear.

Of the five shelters, only one was intact. Two of them were nothing but heaps of planks. The ear was now accustomed to all the noises; it had learnt to know when danger was near and every sound had its own special significance in our minds. Every afternoon the action began again, it was always the same thing. Weariness made our heads and limbs seem heavy. Life was passing by in this way now. From time to time, delegates went to the different companies, bending down almost double, tricking danger.

In the shelters, a fool was telling extraordinary tales, tales of riotous life and of quarrels. Everyone laughed. His face was all awry, but he would not upon any account laugh himself. There was a red-haired young man there, too, with long hair. He was pale and sickly. He was listening anxiously to all the sounds outside. Why in the world did he think so much of his life. He began arguing when it was his turn to start and then rushed out into the danger, as though his fate were a thing of great importance. We are all of us like that.

Some of the men were asleep, others were eating, and a fierce-looking Grenadier was polishing the head of a shell.

As a matter of fact, we could really have lived there

a long time, it was only a question of habit and custom.

To our right, the big green shells kept bursting fairly regularly on a group of houses. Farther on, shell-mines kept falling. No one paid any attention to these now. They came at their own sweet will on our side. Suddenly, a long, dark mass was to be seen rushing along and turning round and round above a roof. Was it a man that had been flung into the air? No, it was a shell that had not exploded and which had bounded again on to the footpath. The darkness came over us for the third time. It slowly changed the luminous tints of the sky into pastel-like grey harmonies, which grew slowly fainter and ended in darkness.

Suddenly, red fuses were flung into the air. An attack had begun. In a few seconds, all the cannons were thundering together. The German shrapnels exploded four at a time in a luminous mass of absinthe green, in the centre of which were red balls. They rent the air with a huge noise. The seventy-fives rushed out yelling. In the distance, their sudden flames were like gigantic will-o'-the-wisps. A machine-gun could now be heard, and then a second one, and a third. Some soldiers of the 418th passed along in close file, dressed in pale blue which mingled with the darkness. Their bayonets glittered in the green light of the fuses, and then again, with mad yells, the "big" shells appeared on the plateau, flinging into the air opaque clouds which gathered round us. Gun firing could be heard crackling all along the line. An immense brazier had been lighted at Lizerne. It grew bigger and bigger. And among the piles of dark night clouds, above Steenstraete in flames, a blood-red moon arose.

CHAPTER XXXV

Steenstraete

(May 25, 1915)

BY DR. DUWEZ, ARMY SURGEON TO THE REGIMENT OF
GRENADIERS

AT Steenstraete, the upheaval, the absolute destruction of everything is formidable. The very places where the houses stood are only recognisable by the heaps of broken bricks of their foundations. There was not much left when we arrived in the Sector, but, at present, there is not even one stone upon another. Everywhere there are craters hollowed out, and these are so close together that they run into each other. In one of these, a German corpse could be seen, standing up, buried up to his waist and headless. Pieces of uniforms were visible in the beaten soil, and, as the ground gave way, one saw a face under one's feet, the shape of which was vaguely outlined and the mouth, with its white teeth, was open like a rat hole.

We saw what had been the brewery with its huge cellars. It had fallen completely in. We could only recognise the road by its torn-up pavement and its twisted rails. Of all Steenstraete, there is nothing left, it has been razed to the ground. The bridge is nothing but a wretched heap of old iron.

The Steenstraete Bridge! Names and sites, like

people, acquire their titles of nobility. At present, the Algerian sharp-shooters are guarding the bridge. In order to go forward, we had to disturb the sentinels who were lost in thought near their battlements. We had to climb over the sleeping soldiers, too. Some of them had hollowed out alcoves in the earth and they were almost buried in them. Others had stretched their tents out on the stakes and they were sleeping in the square of shade which this afforded. They rather blocked the way for the patrol's rounds. Their greenish yellow uniform was almost the colour of the ground. Here and there, the red of a *chéchia* cap gave relief to the colouring. Bayonets could be seen everywhere, glittering in the sunshine. They had a *crapouillot*, a bomb-thrower and a German machine-gun, all this among the battery, together with sacks of earth, dry mud, and the ruins of walls which formed the trenches. The *crapouillot* seemed to be crouching down, whilst the machine-gun and the bomb-thrower stretched their necks forward in the direction of the enemy. Here and there, the green and yellow bags, which the Germans had left behind them, reminded us of the recent occupation. It was a tranquil moment, for the cannon was silent.

Under the ardent sun, with the dry mud colour which pervaded everything, the outlines of the Algerian sharp-shooters, their bronzed complexions and their eagle-like profiles reminded one of an Oriental street.

One can have no idea of modern warfare without having seen the ground all torn up by shells and hollowed out in all directions by trenches, with the old communication passages of the Germans cutting ours perpendicularly. Houses, the road, gardens,

fields are all mixed up in one mass of ruin and broken earth. It is no use expecting to find here that comfort which embellishes calmer war zones; it is useless to look for tombs all regularly arranged and covered with grass, each one with a cross, on which the dead man's name is written in white letters.

Here and there, in this region, a rusty bayonet emerges, and on it is a tattered military cap. Two sticks joined together to form a cross may also be seen now and then, but that is all. And yet, under this ground, there are heaps and heaps of dead bodies buried hap-hazard. The sharp-shooters have taken some of them for consolidating their parapet. Cellars fell in burying their occupants. On every side there are whiffs of strong odours. The ground moves under our feet and whenever one treads in muddy puddles, this odour is still stronger. The wind of Death has passed. Everything is destroyed here, and even the grass does not grow again in such spots.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Lizerne

(June, 1915)

**BY DR. DUWEZ, ARMY SURGEON TO THE REGIMENT OF
GRENADIERS**

WE were walking along the winding attack trench, skirting the Yperlée. It is a trench that gradually gets more and more shallow. Just where it ends, the dead bodies of two French soldiers were lying, their faces black and unrecognisable. Water was running over the injured thigh of one of them and his flesh was as red as his trousers. The brook among the wild grasses was full of rubbish of all sorts; and the tall trees sheltering it were either headless, or they had been mown down, and were lying shattered on the ground. Some of the branches had resprouted and the muddy brooklet, in which mouldy bread and tins of provisions were floating, continued to flow slowly on. Polluted, but glorious, it went on over crumbling tree trunks and improvised bridges, past earth shelters and mud banks towards archways that, in the distance, appear to be covered with flowers. It was flowing on towards that old gay, laughing valley, little known formerly, but which now bears the charming and terrible name of the "covered road of the Yperlée."

We then went along the other trench, in which are the tombs of many of our men. A foot could be seen emerging from the parapet, and everywhere was that odour that one can never forget, the odour that reveals the presence of dead bodies more distinctly than the sight of them.

We then went along the parallel one. It curves inwards near Lizerne and we crossed the road under the district-railway.

By dint of creeping, climbing, and running, we managed to reach the German trench which forms an arched circle on the other side of the village. It had been entirely overturned by the shells. We could see grey coats that had been left behind, stiffened legs emerging from the embankment, and cartridges. The houses, behind which the trench had been constructed, had fallen down, whole pieces of the walls together, but there was more character about them than those of Steenstraete, as they showed that they had been houses. The whole of the back of one house had fallen all in a piece. Under the ruins could be seen three dead bodies of *Joyeux*,¹ their skulls crushed and covered with long, dull brown hair. I crossed the road and entered a little house, the general sitting-room of which was still intact. A Boche was lying there with his limbs stretched out, his face black, his nose flattened, and his eyes sunken. Flies had left their traces on his chin and cheeks. He had evidently been searched, as the buttons of his coat had been cut off, but he still had his boots on.

The whole hamlet was nothing but a heap of ruins. Guns, bayonets, beds of sacking, and belts were flung about everywhere. The dead could scarcely be dis-

¹ Soldiers belonging to the African Battalion.

tinguished from the ground which partially covered them. Shells had hollowed out holes everywhere and on returning from the other side of the road, I walked over half-buried corpses.

From where we were, we looked over the plain in the distance, the beautiful plain with its gentle undulations and its groups of trees here and there. It was quite green and looked so flourishing and lovely. We could see the brown line of our trenches and those of the Germans. Nearer to us, all the ground was furrowed with communication trenches, with elements of defence, with sacks of earth for fortification. It seemed as though enormous ants had devastated the beautiful garden of Flanders.

The sky was wonderfully blue. We could see it between the broken-up roofs, through the holes in the walls, between the branches of the rent trees, between the fragments of exploded barrels, which were spread out fan-shaped like palm leaves. The shrubs were already sprouting again over the ruins. Birds were singing in the midst of the silence, and the fields of turnips, which had gone to seed and which were flowering, formed big yellow patches among the corn.

And these were the places which had witnessed such hard fighting, the places over which avalanches of fire had swept. They were now given over to silence, and mankind there was nothing more than flattened carrion, almost in a state of deliquescence, only to be recognised by his colourless hair and by the blue or grey coat which covered him. And Nature, as we saw, was ready to cover everything up, Nature which never dies. In an instant, the products of so many centuries of civilisation had been annihilated there. But the space devastated, in spite of its extent,

is remarkably limited, and only the works of man and man himself had suffered. The enemy was there and had seen us, for we were absolutely in the open. We were comparatively safe though for, near though we were, we were too small. Shells of 15 calibre began to be fired again at Lizerne. They fell with a great noise, sending columns of rubbish and clouds of black smoke into the air. We set off again, taking with us a German bayonet, a *chéchia*, a shell fuse, and some yellow and purple pansies of rich colouring, which had flowered in the deserted gardens. We went back by the intricate trench passages. In a solitary shelter, by the side of one of these, a man belonging to the 418th was lying. We recognised him, thanks to his brown, ribbed velveteen trousers and his pale blue coat, with its two squares of vivid yellow on the collar. He was lying on his back and some open letters were on his chest. Some of his friends had fastened some papers on the entrance to the hole, giving his name. Standing there, bareheaded, in the glaring sunshine, we remained for a moment looking at this man, who, here alone, far away from his own people, had seen his moment of happiness and glory escape him for ever.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Death of Sergeant Count Charles d'Ansembourg

**BY DR. DUWEZ, ARMY SURGEON TO THE REGIMENT OF
GRENADIERS**

BETWEEN the walls of sacks, by the breach hollowed out in the dyke, we could see the Yser, its banks of mud, and its grey, tranquil stream. The green bank on the other side was reflected in it, surmounted by spikes lifting their sharp points towards the sky.

The raft glided along noiselessly. The man who was drawing the rope was crouching down at the water's edge and his khaki coat made him look like a big rat curled up. In the breach opposite, one or two anxious faces could be seen. The raft bunted against the edge. We were almost in the enemy's territory.

Along the little dyke was a shallow trench hollowed out in the thick grasses. One had to bend almost double in order to be protected by the top of the trench. The Yser, at our feet, made a bend and curved inwards towards Dixmude. The pink and white ruins of this town could be seen in the background. The trench then continued higher up and very soon we were in the little post.

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It was there that Sergeant d'Ansembourg was lying. A soldier was endeavouring to staunch the blood which, flowing in long drops over the face and from the back of the wounded man's head, formed a little pool. The ball had struck him just above the right eye, near the temple. It had made a hole in the cap lying near the grenade. The wound was a mortal one; there was nothing to be done. All that remained of life was gently ebbing away.

As yet, the paralysis was not complete. Some faculties still remained. When the wound was dressed, the poor man remained for a few seconds, holding his head with his hands, leaning on his elbow, as though wrapt in thought. He did not recover consciousness, though, for a single minute, nor did he utter a word.

He had on his waterproof coat, of a greenish colour, and his brown uniform with a leather belt. The refined outline of his sympathetic face could be seen. In the little excavation, with its steep approach, everything was the colour of the ground. The blood stains alone were a cruel contrast to the rest of the colouring.

Presently a head appeared at the edge of our burrow. It was a soldier bringing with him a stretcher. He gave a leap and then came in on all fours. Gently we laid the wounded man on the stretcher. Bullets grazed the top of the earthen parapet, flinging rubbish and dust over us. The Germans were there, quite near, only fifty yards away probably.

The wounded man lay there unconscious, his legs already paralysed, his arm clenched on his breast. We pushed the stretcher a little further forward, where the digging had been deeper. We were in a

trench that had belonged to the enemy and had been won by our men. There were niches in the walls, which had served as refuge during bombardments. By crouching down, we could get right into these niches with our knees up to our chins. At the end of the passage were some sacks, used for protecting the sentinel. The sky was blue above us, but we could not look at it, as our attention was given to the man lying there before us.

"He was too daring," said a Corporal. "Yesterday, he came boldly in without stooping in the least. To-day I was here and, as I watched him coming in, I was just beginning to cry out: 'Sergeant, what are you doing?' when I saw him sink down. He fell there, against the side first, and then he rolled down."

The man who spoke had the thin, stern-looking face peculiar to those who have suffered much during the war.

"I have seen plenty wounded," he continued, "but never anyone like that whilst I was speaking to him. You cannot imagine the impression it makes."

A man who was crouching down making the trench deeper, threw some earth over the parapet. Some bullets dashed against it. The face of the wounded man grew gradually more and more lifeless and his breathing became more difficult. In order to take him away, we were obliged to wait until the blue of the sky grew fainter and the darkness came on. To attempt anything else meant certain death. Everyone tried to say something, by way of helping to kill time.

"He was not even on duty. He volunteered to give a hand in taking the post. 'I am better qualified than the others, Commandant,' he said, 'for risking

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my life. I am not married and I am not an only son. If I happen to disappear, I shall leave no one depending on me.'"

Leaning against the parapet, we waited there. It began to get gradually colder and colder, and our heads and limbs were feeling more and more the fatigue of three days' consecutive bombardment. Our eyes were fixed all the time on the motionless features of the man whom we had known so gay and so full of life.

In the distance a mine exploded, giving a sudden shock to the ground. A part of the trench had blown up, it was a piece of the "Death Trench" that had disappeared in the air. An *aéroplane* then came and shooting followed it. The cannon now made its voice heard. The time seems long when one is waiting and watching and, as the wounded man's face changed, our hearts grew fuller and fuller, and we suffered acutely as we watched this life passing slowly away. Under the slight moustache, the white teeth could now be seen, the uninjured eye had lost its expression and brilliancy, and only one of the slender, sun-burnt hands moved.

The sky over our heads began to get paler and paler. The white clouds then turned grey and mauve. The hour was approaching for us to leave and, creeping along, we went to see how the land lay, in order to decide which way to go.

The green ground was all pierced with shell holes newly made in the dark earth. Spikes were to be seen everywhere, ours made of wood, and the others of iron, protected by barbed wire. Rubbish of all kinds strewed the soil. On the other side of the winding Yser, the green and brown dyke looked like a cliff

rising above the water, that wonderful dyke against which the barbarous wave of invaders had lashed in fury and then died away.

It was just the moment when the blazing light fades and every different colour stands out clearly.

The piles of the two landing stages, made of planks, were plunged in the water.

One of us pushing and the other pulling, we brought the stretcher to the little trench. The man who had been crouching like a rat at the riverside was to be seen again. He gave a low whistle and the raft came gliding along the water. On returning, weighed down by us, it dipped in front, thus breaking the wavelets.

The entrance was very narrow. We had to carry the wounded man through labyrinths of passages with their walls of sacks of earth. This dyke, which, from the other side, looks so beautiful in all its greenery under the blue sky, showed up its ugliness and misery on our side. The whole trench had been devastated by the bombardment and behind it was nothing but a chaos of torn-up earth amidst pools of water.

In the distance could be seen the plain, finishing in the horizon by a thin band of trees and houses, outlined in black against the sunset. The bushes nearer to us were of a dense, green colour and the sky gradually became livid and heavy, with a few streaks of bluish green.

Darkness was coming over us and had already swooped down on the passages, with their medley of rubbish. The wounded man was now lying quite motionless, unconscious, with his eye swollen and his face rigid. He was wrapped round in a blanket.

Caps in hand, officers and soldiers watched him pass away. With their earth-coloured coats, they

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looked like so many shadows. They listened in silence to the last prayers.

In the growing darkness, he was carried away along the path under the willow-trees. A mist was stretching over the plain and a fog was rising from among the reeds. For another moment we could see the dark outline of the stretcher-bearers.

How many we had known who had come amongst us young and joyous! And how many of them had we seen carried away in the darkness, along the path under the willow-trees! . . .

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A Guard on the Yser:—The Death Trench

(June 2, 1915)

BY CORPORAL J. LIBOIS, OF THE 12TH LINE REGIMENT

This day's work was more terrible than the Dixmude battles. I certify that Corporal Libois has given an exact account of the critical situation in the Death Trench of Milestone 16 on the Yser. Sub-Lieutenant Vueghs of the 12th Line Regiment.

Extract from a letter, 12.9.15.

THE French offensive of Arras led to unusual activity on our front. Our Regiment, which had just come back from the thankless Oostkerke Sector, had some very painful experiences during that week, and some of our Battalions were severely tried.

On the night in question, our Company had to relieve guard. Certain sections were ordered to the outposts.

"To-morrow," said Lieutenant Vueghs, "we shall occupy a position on the Yser dyke. Our various posts will be ranged along a communication trench that has been made by the Engineers, but in this trench, a result of recent attacks, there are still about thirty dead men. As we come across them, we are to pick them up and place them on the parapet. The stretcher-bearers will then take them away. One

more word, this trench leads into the German lines on the other side of the Yser, and comes, therefore, under the enemy's firing. You will have to stoop down, and even creep along, when the passage is too low. There must be great caution as you go along. That is all I have to say. As for the rest, I trust to you."

The Lieutenant was to command the sap head, Trench No. 1. This was the most advanced of all the posts, only thirty yards away from the Boches. I was to be there too, and Sergeant Deltenre with about ten men. What would be the outcome, we wondered? At any rate, it would be something fresh, and we were delighted at this.

The summer twilight came very gradually. The soldiers lined up, with their heavy knapsacks on their backs, and their wallets containing provisions for two days.

"Right! Four in a line! March!" and quite tranquilly, the Company filed by in a long column, crossing the meadows and the fields of sweet-scented horse-beans. We went along humming and singing. Half-way, we had the usual halt and rest. The soldiers lying in the fields, in the dusk, gave a picturesque note to the scene. The purple-tinted clouds of the beautiful sunset of Flanders gradually took a pinky shade. In front of us, towards the east, was the horribly mutilated steeple of the Oostkerke Church, standing out, with extraordinary clearness, against the great red disc of the moon, which was just rising. And in the background could already be seen mysterious stars flashing forth from the earth. These were the brilliant and ephemeral enemy fuses. Everything else was absolutely calm. From time to time, a

cricket replied to another cricket. A cool wind swept over us and, from the various groups, here and there, melancholy refrains lulled us and made us dreamy.

Our officers appeared to be enjoying the poetry of it all, for they gave us a rather longer halt than the time fixed.

"Laugh and sing," they perhaps thought, "be gay and joyful, a little later on, we shall, perhaps, bring back with us, the glorious remains of one or other of your comrades, now singing there!"

On the Yser plains, there are probably places destined for many of us. Heaven knows that we all value life, and yet these thoughts do not make us sad and, thanks to a force of character which we never suspected, there is more liveliness and sincere gaiety to be found among the simple soldiers than anywhere else.

Presently the order came to shoulder arms, and we set off once more. The calm that we had enjoyed was only a truce. It was now broken by the deafening volleys of our guns. The enemy's lines were being bombarded and it was a great joy to us to see the flashes over there, to the right, produced by the explosions of our shells. We had now entered the danger zone and the darkness was intense. We advanced in Indian file, one platoon at a time. In the background, lighted up almost all the time by the luminous fuses of the Germans, we could see outlines of figures bending down, stooping low, and then standing up again. It was like a scene out of some enchanted land.

Finally, we reached our trenches. The relieving of the guard took place very quickly with no waiting about. The enemy was bombarding us, but the aim

was not good. We began to fit up and remake our shelters. I made a reconnaissance in the direction of the communication trench. The entrance was obstructed by the evacuation of the dead bodies. We had a most awful task. The stretcher-bearers, moving along on their backs, dragged the bodies with them by ropes. These bodies were already in a state of decomposition and, when they came into the light, it could be seen that their clothes were torn off and that their skin was grazed. Shrapnels kept exploding near us, so that we had to keep close to the parapet. The night passed without any other incident than the visit of the General of the Division. In the morning our watch was over and, when the lookouts were placed, we had permission to sleep. All day long we remained walled up in our trenches of sacks. From the Dixmude posts, which dominated us, the enemy kept an eye on us and, each time that we showed any sign of life, proved to us that we were very carefully watched. From time to time, by way of entertainment, our outposts were bombarded. At night, our time came for relieving guard again. We restored ourselves with coffee, for we were in a very thirsty place. We took a good provision of cartridges, of sacks of earth, and, with heavy shields, leaving our knapsacks in safety, we started, at 11 o'clock, on our march through the Yser communication trench.

It was a march that appeared to us to last a century, and certainly Dante's imagination, in his visions of hell, never surpassed the horrors of it. The passage was narrow and skirted the parapet of the Yser. Its access was so difficult and trying, that it was no use thinking of removing the dead which obstructed it.

We had to imitate the serpent, the toad, and the mole. In order to pass the guard we were relieving, the men had to lie down flat and we had to crawl over them. No one spoke a word. Shrapnels kept exploding and bullets whizzed along continually, flattening themselves against the parapet. I saw some of them ploughing up the earth scarcely twenty centimetres above the heads of my comrades, and I was afraid each time that, in rebounding, they would wound one or another of them. We were all wedged in as though in a vice. At times, we had to advance quickly, bent nearly double, our backs almost broken, at times we had to crawl along, pushing ourselves onward with our elbows and knees, letting go our shields which encumbered us and which, knocking against the sides, made a sonorous noise. When we came to embattlements, watched as we were by the marksmen posted on the other side of the Yser, we had to rush for our lives. Our faces were bathed in perspiration. Suddenly, we came across a dark, motionless mass on the ground. We thought it might be one of the engineers at work.

"Hi there, what are you doing? Answer!" ordered the Lieutenant. Shaking his arm, we found that it dropped lifeless.

"Forward! over the dead man!" was our order. Shuddering, and gasping for breath, we obeyed. Feeling for him with our feet and slipping over his head, we went on our way. Presently we had reached the spot known as "the house in ruins." The parapet had been torn away by a shell, and this might expose us to view. We had to climb and jump at the same time. Horrors! I fell with my hand on the icy face of a dead man. The German Artillery now came into

play. The devilish Schoorbakke battery took the dyke by enfilade and bombarded us. The shells arrived whizzing along and bursting with a frightful noise, making the dyke crumble, and sprinkling us with all kinds of rubbish. There was a second's calm. By the livid light of the fuses, a horrible sight was to be seen, living men swarming along the passage among human fragments in a state of decomposition, the most appalling and terrifying wrecks of humanity imaginable. Horror, repulsion, and disgust were what we felt, but we were compelled to master our feelings. We had to be superhuman. The perspiration ran from our faces on to the dead men, as we climbed over them. And over our heads the bullets never ceased pouring down, whilst the shells whizzed along and the fuses kept lighting us up.

Panting and breathless, with our tongues hanging out and our backs aching so painfully that some of our men were just going to stand upright for a moment's relief when they were stopped by the whizzing of bullets overhead. We pushed on again and it seemed as though we should never be at the end of the passage. At one moment, we lost sight of the file and feared that we had passed the post. My brother headed the little group that had become separated from the others, and I closed the march. Fortunately we were able to join our comrades again. Just at this moment, we came to a number of corpses in a worse state than the others. We had to pass over them, our faces almost touching theirs, our knees on their legs. A terrible putrid odour emanated from them, an odour that will always be an infernal memory. Again we found ourselves knocking against some human bodies. But this time we were crawling over living

men. Finally, we arrived at our post. What a relief it was to us! Our end had been accomplished. We had relieved the guard and not one of us had been hit. Our instructions were simple. We had to keep a lookout and defend ourselves in case of attack. We thought we should have nothing to fear from the German Artillery, as their own post was so near. The one thing was to escape bombs and grenades. When the service was organised, we hollowed out some shallow burrows to serve as shelters. The Lieutenant passed me a bottle and told me to disinfect a dead man buried in the trench, whose shoulder was visible.

In order to prevent the Boches from approaching, we fired over the parapet all night without showing ourselves. Towards 4.30, when the dawn was breaking, I started off in search of the body I was to disinfect. A few yards away, just at the entrance of the next trench, I found a shapeless mass covered with linen. Was this the one? After a moment's hesitation, I raised the garment which covered a figure and saw a face. The features had not changed and the man looked as though he were asleep. I sprinkled the body with the liquid which the Lieutenant had given me and covered it again gently. The second corpse, of which the Lieutenant had spoken, was a little farther on. The shoulder was rather above the parapet. We covered it with earth and, towards six o'clock, the stretcher-bearers arrived to take the two dead men away. This was such a dangerous task, however, that the Lieutenant would not allow them to carry it out. They took away the other dead bodies and that made it less difficult to get out of the trench. By means of the periscope, I now looked at

the German trenches, and thereupon that instrument became a target for their bullets. Projectiles now began to arrive from behind us. We wondered what this meant, and the Lieutenant sent word to Sergeant Denis, who was at the last post but one. We were informed that Sergeant Denis had just been killed by a bullet in the head. On passing by an embattlement, someone had called out to him to stoop down, but it was too late, a bullet had killed him instantaneously. Poor Sergeant Denis. Yesterday evening, when I crawled over him, he said to me: "Good-bye, I shall see you again soon." I wondered, in spite of myself, whether the fate in store for me might make his words prove true. He had fallen against Corporal G——, without uttering a word, but his eyes had been fixed earnestly on him. We can only hope that the Company will not have to deplore other losses.

I took notes, thanks to the periscope, and I fired from an embattlement through a German embattlement. The enemy was not long in replying with dumdums, destroying our embattlement over which were the upper sacks of the parapet. On the other side of the Yser in the German trench, I could distinguish a Boche periscope, and I was quite amazed to see a soldier's bust above the parapet. He did not stay there long. There was a long, soft, whizzing sound. This was something fresh: *floo-oo-floo-oo—*. They were grenades, some of which burst over our shelters, and some beyond them. Only a few were thrown and, dismal though their noise was, it did not alarm us.

It was a beautiful, sunshiny day. Our aircraft could be seen against the blue of the sky. Our

machines were pursued by the shrapnels of the Boches but these did them no harm. Our Artillery was firing quite near to us and we had to take shelter from the shell fragments. Some of our men had lost their blankets, and some their provisions, during yesterday's march. They were separated from us by an obstacle. We passed them some food and exchanged some amusing notes. The Lieutenant, by way of a souvenir, took the signature of each occupant of the post, in his note-book. Others followed his example. And the day passed by very, very slowly. Whilst keeping watch, we talked with the Lieutenant about the war, about peace and our respective occupations. We talked about our preferences and our tastes, whilst, only a few yards away, myriads of big flies danced a ghastly saraband around the body of our poor comrade. The heat began to be overpowering: whiffs of warm, nauseous air kept rising and took our appetites away. By way of rewarding us, the Lieutenant promised us each a good glass, if everyone of Post I. returned safe and sound. It certainly would not be our fault if we failed to accept this invitation.

At half-past twelve, the observer on the river bank signalled to us that an officer was on his round. We all smiled, thinking it was a joke. Colonel Rademakers¹ of the 3rd Chasseurs suddenly appeared in the corner of our trench. We were amazed and wondered how he had got there. Had he come up from underground or had he fallen from the skies? Considering his size, it is certain that he could not have come through the passage without having been massacred fifty times over. He was there, nevertheless, and very much alive, his fine face expressive of

¹ Killed a few days later by a shell fragment.

his natural gaiety and of his great courage. He looked through the periscope, wondering whether the Boches would honour him with a bullet. He certainly was an officer of the "right sort."

Night came on and the embattlement that had been discovered had its place changed, and was strengthened by a shield. We kept a still stricter watch. Towards 9.30, the firing became violent. A quantity of explosive shells burst on our parapet and gave us the impression that the Boches were on our trench and were firing point blank at us, so violent was the dry sound of the explosions. In our post, two of our guns would not fire any more. An attack seemed imminent. We prepared our bayonets and then fired without ceasing. One of our comrades who was completely worn out, and could not stand, was seated near us loading the guns for us to fire. It was midnight when the relief guard arrived. The orders were given while we continued firing. "Keep a watch on the bank. Attention at that battlement! On guard! Good luck!"

Our return was safely effected, but not without difficulty. It was easier than our coming had been, as most of the dead men had been evacuated. Finally, we were out of that hell once more. The whole post was safe and sound. Shrapnels were bursting quite near to us and here, in the first line trenches, where we had had to hide and press against the parapet yesterday, we felt that we were almost in security. We wanted to halt in the very midst of the danger zone, to get our breath, but the officers begged us to be prudent and we left the trenches. In the distance, we saw the stretcher-bearers carrying away the body of poor Sergeant Denis to the Lesenburg Cemetery.

We rested a little on the way, when we were in the rear, and each one gave his experiences, describing various incidents with picturesque details. Once more we set off, and at four in the morning we were back at our quarters. It was now light and the larks had been singing a long time. It seemed to me as though everything around us was quite new to us, and as though a century had passed since we had seen this familiar landscape. We felt intense satisfaction and deep joy at having accomplished a difficult task. Everyone was happy and longed to be able to write to his relatives and friends, to all those for whom he cared and whom he was now defending.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Nieuport in Ruins

BY SUB-LIEUTENANT L. GILMONT, DIRECTOR OF THE AUTOMOBILE PARK, OCEAN AMBULANCE, LA PANNE

WHEN the battle of the Yser was over, and the Teuton hordes were stopped, Nieuport, the advance post of the immense front reaching from the North Sea to the Vosges, had to suffer pitiless destruction. It was the ransom we had to pay, because their ineffectual effort had been crushed by the steadfast defence of our heroes. I was present at the slow death of Nieuport and, as I had to go there frequently, I never passed by the heaped-up ruins without experiencing a sentiment of infinite sadness mingled with revolt. How many times its faithful admirers questioned me about its fate! How the old city had always charmed us by its exquisite archaism, with its little narrow, picturesque streets cut in straight angles, its quaint, yellow-ochre buildings with their green shutters, its church with the parvis planted with tall, protecting trees, its imposing Templars' Tower, its Archdukes' House teeming with memories, and above all its massive Cloth Hall, proudly situated on the Market Place. What pen can ever faithfully depict the havoc that seventeen months of war have made of the exquisite Flemish city we had all known and

loved? As far away as Oostdunkerque, the vision of war begins. The population has been evacuated and here and there, along the streets, there are shattered houses. Then comes the winding road across deserted fields and the triangular wood, that ill-omened wood, where so many of our brave men fell, where the shells rained down with desperate persistency. At present, all is sad silence, disturbed only by detonations in the vicinity, by the sound of a cart passing, or by the measured tread of troops filing by along the edge of the road. On coming out of the wood, the horizon is suddenly in view and the sight is heartrending. In the background is the town in ruins, and all along the road little houses that have fallen in. On each side a former arm of the sea cuts the dreary moor, which is skirted by uncultivated meadows, partially wooded. Most of the sublime old trees are lying there, all twisted by the machine-guns, silent for evermore. Some of those which are still standing seem to be lifting their bare branches heavenwards, in fruitless protest. We crossed the bridge and the level-crossing, with its little guard-house. The latter had fallen on to a cart, which now stood there unable to move under its unexpected burden. And there, with its Boulevard leading to the old station, all perforated now with enormous craters, are the first houses of the town. The deflagrations were all brittle, and we were in the very midst of the furnace. It was a vision of all that is horrible and, above everything else, there was that indescribable, persistent odour of rubbish, dust, and death. . . .

Other martyred towns allow the spectator time enough to become accustomed to the frightful vision. The farther one goes, the more do the wounds appear

huge and cruel. But here, the chaos and ruin strike one immediately.

Nieuport, like Dixmude and Ypres, shared the sad privilege of an absolute and systematic destruction. There are rent walls everywhere and piled-up ruins, from which the most extraordinary fragments of rubbish emerge, showing all that remains of furniture, so often endeared to its owners by fond memories. Not a single house has been spared. The roofs and the floors, riddled by shells, are shapeless masses now lying on the ground. A few house fronts are still standing, showing the trace of streets all dismal and deserted, except when a few rare soldiers pass silently by, looking like so many wandering ghosts in the midst of fantastical scenery. The Market Place, adjoining the church, was specially aimed at. It is now unrecognisable, thanks to constant bombardment. In a corner, can be seen the massive outline of the Cloth Hall. It is disfigured by horrible wounds, but is still fascinating. It was one of the most interesting monuments of our Flemish art of the fifteenth century. The injuries of time, and those of men, had hitherto respected its primitive architecture. The roof, which was of a special technique, had escaped until now, but these last days it fell in, under a veritable avalanche of balls. Quite near to it stands the spectre of the ruined church. I could still see it, as it used to be, dominating the whole town with its imposing mass, interesting to contemplate and to study in every detail. It was original, too, on account of its various reconstructions, the traces of which could be seen in the different styles composing it, from primitive Gothic to the Renaissance and Louis XIV. And what is left now of all this? One night, it was

set on fire by shells, and the deluge of shrapnels, which immediately surrounded the building, prevented anyone from saving the least object. The vaulted roof fell in. Charred walls, riddled by shell fragments, now frame the columns which are still standing, supporting the graceful ogives that had been sullied by the odious aggression. Quantities of material lie in unequal piles; here and there a few decorative pieces, disfigured by their fall. It is an imposing looking skeleton, though, in its despair, and it seems as though it wants to remain there, as a witness, after its own death, to its past grandeur.

One tragic relic of its wreckage still remains, and that is the Tower. In spite of numberless projectiles, its massive construction, devastated, but not conquered, persists in dominating the horizon of Flanders. It had been constructed, primitively, to support three times its weight. It scorned the shells which wounded it without knocking it down, and its dark mass, proudly standing in the midst of the heaped-up ruins, seems to be defying the infernal inventions aimed at it.

The cemetery adjoining the church is a most touching sight. Loving hands have managed to keep the graves in order and they are covered with flowers. There are very many of these graves, and some are even on the paths. Not a single tomb is neglected. There are flowers, vases, statuettes, and ancient woodwork, side by side with figures of coloured plaster. All that could be rescued from the ruins has been used for honouring the memory of those who are no more. There is one grave which I shall never forget. It is surrounded by the ironwork of a child's bedstead and, with infinite care, climbing plants and flowers have

been trained over this. In the centre, there are more plants, a crucifix and two statues forming a calvary.

One night we were crossing this resting-place, where so many heroes are sleeping their last sleep, when we witnessed a touching scene. We heard the tread of approaching footsteps and a murmur of voices. The chaplain, in his surplice, advanced, reciting the Prayers for the Dead. Behind him, on a stretcher, carried by two sailors, was a long form. They went on their way slowly to the other end of the cemetery, where a grave had been prepared. They had to wait a little, as in order to find the grave they needed the light of the fuses. The body was lowered, a few more prayers were said, and then the dull thud of the earth falling, and that was all. . . . There was the most impressive silence, in spite of the cannon which kept vomiting forth death, and the almost uninterrupted crackling of the bullets. A few hundred yards away, the horizon, forming a semicircle was lighted up at quick intervals by the fuses which rose, throwing their reddish glow over the darkness, lighting up the dreary plain, on the screen of which the sombre mass of the tower, and the irregular lines of the dismantled pilasters and of the arches, stood out all the more distinctly. A terrified bat turned wildly about in the air, seeking a shelter that it could no longer find.

I remember that I spent that night at the relief station of the Fusiliers, where I found a shelter for my men and where I was most hospitably treated. In a cellar, adjoining the one in which their poor wounded comrades were lying, a bed was very quickly made for me. The walls of this improvised bedroom were papered with red, striped paper, comfortable furniture was arranged here and there, and I should certainly

have slept, and not thought any more about the war, if it had not been for the sound of the cannon, the detonations of the grenades, and the clack of the bullets which, from time to time, came flattening themselves against the outside of the wall.

At 3 o'clock, I was called, and we went on to the Town Hall, to do some work there at daybreak. It was absolutely calm just then; not the faintest sound, not even the slightest detonation could be heard to disturb the great silence. We arrived at Rue Longue and I saw the beautiful Louis XIV. façade once more. It was so characteristic, with its double flight of stone steps. It stood there almost intact, in one of the angles of the two streets that it ornaments. We went up one flight of stairs and entered the Museum through the bay window. We stopped short in front of a huge, gaping hole, obstructed by all kinds of material. Two shells of 420 calibre had fallen there, taking away with them the whole of the back of the building. When we had finished our work, before leaving what had been the Museum, I looked out at the horizon. There was a wider view from there now, thanks to the fall, one after another, of the crumbling gables. I could see the line of the Yser, and the canals, the destroyed houses of the lock-keepers, and, in the background, the great downs. I then glanced at the place where the huge, documentary picture of the Siege of Nieuport used to hang. I had fetched it away in 1910, and the Kaiser, on his visit to Brussels, had stopped a long time looking at it in a thoughtful, interested way. . . .

On our return, we passed through the town again. It was just rousing to its military life. The firing had recommenced, and from time to time a bullet whizzed through the air.

As we passed by, we looked at what had been the relief station for the sailors. We had seen so much suffering there. Our colleague, Chopard, had been hit near by and had died there. On leaving the town, we passed along the country roads. The sun was shining brightly and it bid fair to be a glorious day. The most fragrant odours came to us from the woods, and the fields were all refreshed with the dew. The birds were singing. . . . We came to an inhabited farm. Children were playing outside, careless of all danger. The father was moving to and fro, attending to his usual daily work. In front of the half open door, the mother could be seen feeding her baby. The hours we had lived through seemed now like a horrible nightmare which we would fain forget. When we came to La Panne, the bell of the Convent of the "Pauvres Claires" of Nieuport, which rings in the little tower of the simple Ocean Chapel, reminded us that it, too, had witnessed tragic moments. Poor little bell! It seems to me that I can see it falling down from its graceful bell-tower, after the brutal and monstrous blow given by the murderous shell. I can still hear its rebounding fall above the noise of the tumbling walls, in the midst of the ghastly furnace. I could hear its last echoing groan, a last protest against the odious destruction. Go on ringing timidly, little bell, in the calm of this bright morning, a calm only disturbed by the noise of the work of death. Very soon, that song shall be followed by another one. You shall ring out then, to all the echoes, the song of joy, the song of victory, announcing to the crowd, thrilled with joy unspeakable, that the hour of the great deliverance has arrived, the hour when we shall find our heroic Belgium free once more and born anew!

CHAPTER XL

The St. Elisabeth Chapel

**BY MARCEL WYSEUR, REGISTRAR TO THE MILITARY COURT.
LA PANNE, AUGUST 26, 1915**

(To the patriotic devotion of M. Louis Gilmont)

EVERYONE knows of the admirable institution founded by Dr. Depage at La Panne: "The Ocean Hospital." A few miles away from the firing line, he has entirely created an establishment which is the most perfect thing of its kind, an institution which, for the last year, has rendered immense service daily. Ever since it was opened at the end of 1914, this hospital has been continually enlarged. Various detached buildings and several fresh departments have been added to the house as it first stood. The latest improvements, as regards science and hygiene, have been introduced and it does not seem possible that a more complete organisation, answering so thoroughly to all needs, could be carried out at the front. In rendering homage here to those who are responsible for this work of public service, we are only anxious to bear testimony to its utility and to acknowledge the merit of the founders of the institution and of all their devoted collaborators. Doctors and nurses alike deserve more than the gratitude of the

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Belgian army and people. They deserve our admiration too.

The last Sunday in August, we were present at the Inauguration of one of the fresh additions to this immense "everything" which constitutes the Ocean Hospital. It was the Inauguration of the Chapel. At the limit of the downs, this simple church, which has sprung out of the earth, as though by magic, faces the sea and the country. It is a building on primitive architectural lines, surmounted by a little sturdy spire. Nothing more was necessary. It was certainly a most impressive scene when the little procession of believers wended their way to the service, called there by the bell of the Convent of the "Pauvres Claires" of Nieuport. The three naves were soon full. In the choir, Her Majesty the Queen, who had graciously deigned to be present at the ceremony, had taken her place, and behind her were a crowd of wounded soldiers. The altar reflected the light of all the burning tapers, the incense was smoking in the silver vessels, and, over yonder, between the nave and the choir, the organs were singing of joy and happiness. The good saints and the little chubby angels could neither believe their eyes nor their ears. The poor, who had expected to die in the general earthquake when their churches were bombarded and the infernal battle was raging around them, arrived here now from everywhere; from Nieuport—the Dead; from Caeskerke—the Sorrowful; from Pervyse—the Devastated; and from Ramscapele—the Solitary. One evening, they had all met in a room. A lamp was burning in front of a tabernacle, there was a kneeling bench for communion, a confessional-box, a pulpit, and some saints, too, as astonished as they were themselves.

Were they really not dreaming now? Was their nightmare over? This was a church, a real church like *their own*! It was full of people, too, and the psalms were being chanted by the choristers. All this seemed more beautiful than the finest dream, and at this festival they forgot all their past anguish and the nightmares they had lived through. And in the midst of the general devotion, the Reverend Father Hénusse, chaplain to the 84th Battery, pronounced the following eloquent words:

"Madame,

"We are to-day inaugurating a Chapel, which, in our gratitude, we have spontaneously dedicated to St. Elisabeth. In the liturgical intention of this dedication, St. Elisabeth was that admirable woman, Elisabeth d'Anjou, a heroine of goodness, gentleness, and charity, whom the Catholic Church has placed on its altars and about whose touching glory everyone has heard. In our dedication, there is something else though, and no one, at any rate no Belgian, will make any mistake about this. In our eyes, the good saint of the twelfth century has been reincarnated in the twentieth century. A few rays from her halo have come to encircle another forehead. Her name is repeated once more, but with an accent of veneration and of tenderness, more keenly felt than would be the case for a foreign Queen who died long centuries ago. In short, according to us, the Ocean Chapel has two patron saints. The one is reigning in heaven above in glory, and only lives on earth in the memory of Christian generations. The other patron saint is She who reigns over the last sands of what was Belgium, but who lives in the hearts of us all.

"When the long ordeal of this war shall have come



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to an end, this humble chapel of wood, which we hope may become historical, will be clothed afresh in a mantle of stone and adorned with the splendour of souvenirs in its coloured glass windows, and in its frescoes. We shall certainly see then the sweet face of the gentle Elisabeth d'Anjou, and the miracle of the roses and the miracle of the leper will be evoked for us. We shall see the leper whom St. Elisabeth tended with her royal hands, to whom she gave her husband's bed, and who suddenly rose, dazzlingly bright, uttering the one word: '*Elisabeth*,' for the leper was Jesus Christ!

"But by the side of those windows, Belgian mothers will ask for others and for other frescoes.

"They will want to see their Queen, who in time of peace, cared for their little children, their poor little children, some of whom were consumptive through poverty. They will want to see their Queen, who, when war broke out, cared for their big children, their poor big children, wounded and mutilated, their health shattered by battle. Belgian mothers will want to see her there, near to the other Saint, so that they may kneel to her and tell her, whilst on their knees, of the ardent gratitude of their hearts. They will want to see her there, because it is her place, beside Him—who pronounced those superhuman words which created Charity: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' They will want to see her there beside Christ, who spake the name of Saint Elisabeth so tenderly, and who, to-day, will surely call another saint by that sweet name, with that accent of infinite tenderness which we all utter, Madame, in the respectful and fervent silence of our hearts.

"Madame:

"My dear friends:

"The great royal heart which thought of establishing a military hospital on the coast, on the very edge of the battle-field, and the generous hearts which helped in the realisation of the project, wished to make this establishment as perfect as possible.

"They have succeeded, and our Ocean Ambulance excites universal admiration.

"By opening this St. Elisabeth Chapel, perfection in this humanitarian work has been attained. The chapel is an essential part of any hospital. A chapel is necessary everywhere where man suffers, as it is a place for prayer. Suffering possesses the mysterious privilege of striking a man hard, of making him think about life. It throws him back on himself, as it were, makes him weep, remember, and dream, and when a man gives himself up to this great inner work, he is not far from finding God. He is ready to pray.

"Suffering, too, possesses the precious gift of humiliating a man, of making him feel the nothing that he is, and of making him realise of what little value he is, and when man is humiliated, he is not far from feeling God bending down towards him. He is ready then to pray.

"Finally, the effect of suffering is often to plunge a man into deep distress, which makes him so unhappy that he utters the supreme cry: 'Help, oh, help me!'

"And when a man cries for help from the bottom of his heart, he is not far from hearing within himself, as though in answer to his appeal, the echo of that infinitely sweet voice which has soothed the miseries of the world for twenty centuries:

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“‘Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’

“This is why the instinct of a man who is suffering is to enter the temple.

“Go to the darkest nave of a church, at a moment when the crowd is not bidden to the traditional exercises of worship, and what do you see? Women, men, and young people praying, and, on their faces, in their eyes, in their very gestures, one sees that they have experienced sorrow, anxiety, and sadness.

“Ask your mothers who are waiting for you, over yonder, in the deepest anguish, where they go in their sorrow and suffering? They will answer you, ‘To Church.’

“At the present moment, ask where the suffering country takes refuge, now that it is mourning for its lost liberty. The answer will be: ‘In the Churches, where the presence of God still permits the people to have the comfort of seeing their tri-coloured flag, of hearing the national hymn, and of responding to it with the cry of love and hopefulness: “Long live the King! Long live Liberty!”’ I tell you that everywhere where there is suffering, there should be a chapel, in which to shelter one’s suffering, under the protecting wing of God!

“But if there be one place of suffering in the world that needs this holy refuge specially, it is the war hospital. The reason of this is on account of the nature of the suffering that men endure there. What is the reason of all this suffering? Why are you here sick and wounded, with your arm or your leg amputated, scarred for ever in the beauty and prime of your early manhood? Why? For the sake of your brothers. The enemy arrived at the frontier, threaten-

ing that sacred property, the native land. In order to defend that land, occupied by seven millions of free-men, two hundred thousand of them rose and, seizing their guns, marched forward to meet the invaders. These two hundred thousand went forth to fight, struggle, fall, and die if necessary for the sake of all the others, for the sake of the women, the children, the aged—and even for the sake of the cowardly shirkers who have not even yet grasped what is their duty. The suffering then of these men, our soldiers, is a suffering of immolation, of sacrifice, of devotion, a loving sacrifice.

“You see, then, why you need a chapel, where you can come to find Him who revealed to the world the beauty, the value, the fecundity of this suffering, a chapel to which you can come and contemplate the Crucified One, the Man of Nazareth, who left us, saying as He went: ‘Love one another, give your lives for each other; the great proof of love is that we should be ready to give our lives for those we love.’ He went about repeating this until that day when, still quite young, only thirty-three years of age, in the prime of His manhood, adding example to precept, freely and courageously, and, in the sight of His broken-hearted mother, He took up the cross and dragged it along through the city and across the country to Calvary. He was then stretched upon it and for three long, mortal hours, under the rays of the sun, He hung upon that cross, dying for those He had loved.

“You need a chapel for those evil hours when, suddenly, you fail to understand the meaning of your suffering and begin to pity yourself, wondering why the lot should have fallen on you, why you should have lost that arm, that hand, that fine workman’s



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tool which was your glory, and with which you earned your living? 'Why should my life be cut in two by this mutilation?' you ask. 'Why should my youth come to an end half way? Why should I be doomed to drag out a miserable existence? Why is all this? And of what use is all that blood poured out obscurely in the trenches?'

"When these gloomy thoughts come to you and your soul is filled with bitter agony, you need a chapel, to which you can come and hear the divine reply to your human complaint, the reply given by that very mouth which revealed to the world the benefits of suffering, the value and the virtue of blood that is shed for the sake of love. It is here, in this chapel, that He will repeat to you and explain to you the mysterious words He addressed to His disciples, three days before He went up to Calvary.

"'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

"'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.'

"His disciples did not understand this at first, but gradually their eyes were opened to this new light, and very soon the world knew the law of life, which was to be one of the most beautiful truths of Christianity: 'When a just man dies, out of his suffering and death shall spring wonderful fruits of light, of truth, and of justice, and life shall become better thereby.' The martyrs gave their blood courageously, and on their tombs their brothers repeat joyfully the great Christian words:

"'Sanguis martyrum semen Christianorum!'
(From the blood of martyrs have sprung Christians!)

"You will come here, dear friends, to learn to understand the sublime utility of your wounds and of your suffering, to learn that the trench is not a trench, but a furrow, and that the blood you have shed there is as a seed which will soon give its beautiful fruit of happiness and liberty to those you love. Thanks to your blood, your country will live! Come often to this little chapel, where Christ is always awaiting you. He awaits you here as His brothers, as those whom He loves best, who resemble Him the most. Come here and pray and remember that your prayer is the most efficacious one of all those that are uttered on earth, because it is your blood crying to God. Come and pray for all those for whom your heart is filled with love, for your aged mother, for your little children and for those who are awaiting you in your saddened home. Pray that they may have hope and courage given them. Come and pray for your brothers-in-arms, those who are continuing the great struggle in which you fell whilst doing your part as brave men. Pray that God may keep them courageous and strong. Come and pray, too, for the men and women who are devoting themselves so admirably to you here, for those who are helping to relieve your suffering and to heal you. Pray that they may have strength given them to carry out their work of pure abnegation and charity. Come and pray for the great cause of the Allies, the cause of right and justice, which is the cause of God. Pray too, that He may soon make it triumph gloriously. Come and pray for our beloved country, the noble martyr to honour. Pray that our country may know, as Christ knew, the great reparation, the supreme rehabilitation, and that after having descended to death, to the death of the Cross, our



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country may be raised by God, that she may obtain a name above all names, that every head may bow before her in the whole universe, and that every tongue shall confess that this little nation is truly great among all nations. Come and pray, come and pray often for Him and for Her who represent, so magnificently, our country and in whom it is incarnated for us. Come and pray for the King and for the Queen."

THE END.



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